



**PHD**

**Refashioning Neopatrimonialism in an Interface Bureaucracy: Nigerian Higher Education**

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**REFASHIONING NEOPATRIMONIALISM IN AN INTERFACE BUREAUCRACY:  
NIGERIAN HIGHER EDUCATION**

Submitted by Christopher Willott for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
University of Bath  
Department of Social and Policy Sciences  
August 2009

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“Immediately white men came justice vanished”.

An elder of Okigwi<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> From A. E. Afigbo, 1972, *The Warrant Chiefs: Indirect Rule in Southeastern Nigeria 1891-1929*, pp. 282-283.



This thesis is dedicated to my mother Clare, my brother Richard, and to the memory of Joe Grove.



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## **Abstract**

The African state has received numerous analyses in academic literature. The vast majority of these studies focus on the essence of the state rather than how it is experienced and lived by its citizens and therefore sacrifice empirical knowledge of state function in favour of abstract conceptualisation. Much academic literature, especially the neopatrimonial approach dominant in political science, examines African states through the prism of Weberian logic and suggests that, because states do not conform to a rational-legal ideal, they must therefore be deficient. These analyses also frequently downplay the impact of colonial rule and postcolonial state formation and politics on the character of contemporary African states, instead stressing the continuities between pre-colonial and modern patterns of rule.

This thesis eschews a normative understanding of the state in favour of an approach grounded in everyday action through analysis of the workings of the Nigerian higher education sector. I argue that this sector is a microcosm of broader state-society relations. The thesis draws on primary data collected through ethnographic methods to analyse how providers and users of a university in south-eastern Nigeria negotiate their passage into, and through, a highly complex and flexible institution. The thesis argues that, among both students and staff, achieving success in Nigerian higher education is dependent on a combination of merit, personal connections and money. The importance of these three elements suggests a system in which norms rooted in bureaucracy (merit), patron-clientism (personal connections) and financial corruption (money) intersect. My empirical research suggests that characterisations of African states as wholly captured by society and functioning as little more than vehicles for particularistic advancement, both central elements of much neopatrimonial state literature, are therefore inaccurate. The thesis also places the Nigerian state in historical context, arguing that, while some patterns of pre-colonial behaviour remain important in contemporary Nigeria, they have been fundamentally altered by colonialism and its aftermath.

This thesis offers an important corrective to the rather abstract and normative ideas that underpin the theory of the African neopatrimonial state. It argues that a better understanding of the state requires a stronger focus on the routine and real experiences of service providers and users and their daily interactions.

## List of acronyms

ASC	Anti-select club
ASUU	Academic Staff Union of Universities
ELDS	Educationally Less Developed States
FCT	Federal Capital Territory
HoD	Head of Department
IMF	International Monetary Fund
JAMB	Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board
LGA	Local Government Area
₦	Naira
NECO	National Examinations Council
OPEC	Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries
PG	Postgraduate
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programme
UK	United Kingdom
UME	University Matriculation Examination
US	United States of America
USEN	University of South Eastern Nigeria
VC	Vice Chancellor
WAEC	West African Examinations Council

## Glossary of terms

Agent	Nigerian English; an intermediary who assists students in finding a place to study at university, and to pass courses once there, without official approval.
Backyard run	Nigerian English; an attempt to circumvent official procedure, for instance to ensure the admission of a particular student to university, through personal connections or financial payment.
Camp	Nigerian English; a factional grouping.
Chop	Nigerian English; the practice of taking something in exchange for providing a service but failing to provide the service promised.
Contractor	Nigerian English; a person employed to sit exams on behalf of a paying customer.
Dash	Nigerian English; the money required to 'grease the wheels' of a transaction. Payment may be made either before the transaction to ensure it proceeds smoothly or after as a form of 'thank you' for a job done.
Eat	See <i>chop</i> .
419	Nigerian English; term for fraud that derives from the section of the Nigerian criminal code that it violates; has recently come to mean corruption in which only the perpetrator benefits and which therefore breaks 'traditional' societal rules of patron-clientism that privilege reciprocity and sharing.
Imma mmadu (IM)	Igbo; 'who you know'.
Lobbying	Nigerian English; making a payment to ensure a particular student is admitted to the university.
Mercenary	See <i>contractor</i> .
Microchip	Nigerian English; pieces of paper with answers written on and folded many times that are used for exam malpractice.
Ndi Igbo	Igbo; Igbo people.
No-nonsense	Nigerian English; term used to describe anyone at university, but most usually a lecturer, who works hard to uphold the stated values of the institution and does not engage in extra-legal practice.
Serious	See <i>no-nonsense</i> .
Sharp practice	Nigerian English; any practice that deviates from the official rules.
Sexual sorting	Nigerian English; a female student providing sexual favours in exchange for passing a course; may be at the instigation of the student but more commonly the lecturer.
Sorting	Nigerian English; making financial payment to ensure the passing of a course; in short, to 'sort the lecturer out'; may be at the instigation of the student or the lecturer.
Udemba	Igbo; 'pride of his people'.
Ye ye	Nigerian English, Yoruba origin; a failure, either through neglecting to take advantage of opportunities to acquire wealth or failing to share acquired wealth with 'your people'.

**Map 1: Nigeria, showing states and geopolitical zones**



Source: adapted from Mustapha, 2004.

## Introduction

This thesis examines the workings of the Nigerian state in relation to the theory of neopatrimonialism, the dominant mode of analysing African states. The thesis uses ethnographic research to challenge the neopatrimonial paradigm of African states and argues that a better understanding of how modern state institutions operate is gained by looking at everyday relationships between the providers and users of these institutions. The thesis critiques neopatrimonial state theory through analysis of two discrete forms of data: existing literature and data collected during nine months of ethnographic fieldwork in Nigeria. This fieldwork was carried out in an elite institution in the higher education sector, entitled the University of South Eastern Nigeria (USEN)<sup>2</sup> in this thesis. I view patterns of behaviour there as a microcosm of broader state-society relationships. The thesis argues that many of the practices highlighted by the neopatrimonial approach – patronage, informality, corruption – are present in the Nigerian state. However, focusing *solely* on these characteristics omits the part played by official norms in influencing behaviour. These official norms are utilised erratically and unevenly, but they exist. I argue that a new approach to the study of the contemporary African state should focus on the multifaceted relationships between service providers and users while adopting a non-normative approach.

My examination of the operation of the contemporary Nigerian state centres on the higher education sector, which has not been examined in this way before. The role of this sector in debates about the state is complex, and my choice of this arena as illustrative of broader state-society relations therefore requires explanation. Higher education institutions perform a number of functions and have been viewed by some as existing in a space that is neither state nor civil society, but simultaneously part of both (Sall et al, 2003). In this role the higher education sector holds the state to account “while potentially providing a source of debate on current directions and visions of society’s future” (ibid: 128). In Nigeria the university sector performs this function (Anugwom, 2002), but academics have also been criticised for their co-optation by military rulers, who sought academic input into their regimes to provide a veneer of legitimacy (Jega, 1995; Amuwo, 2002). The university’s leadership role in society and its relationship with the highest echelons of government are, however, not its only function. It also exists to provide services to its citizens, and in this role it can be viewed as an important aspect of public sector service provision. It is this role that I focus on in this thesis. There are a number of reasons why I argue that this arena is an appropriate site to view broader patterns of state-society relations in Nigeria.

First, the higher education sector is an arena in which there are innumerable daily interactions between street-level bureaucrats and service users. It is through these encounters that a picture emerges of how Nigerians experience the state first-hand. My analysis therefore focuses on “the reality of [the state’s] routine functioning” rather than “its desired or perceived essence” (Blundo, 2006: 802), which tends to be the focus of the neopatrimonial approach. Second, higher education is highly valued among the

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout this thesis the name of the university, the department where I worked and all individuals are pseudonyms. In addition I have changed some details about individual members of staff in order to protect their identities. I have done this because many of the issues I discuss are very sensitive and protecting my respondents from harm is my first priority.



Igbo<sup>3</sup> people of south-eastern Nigeria (Njoku, 1995), which is where I carried out my fieldwork. However, access to an institution that is formally governed by 'official' regulations is frequently achieved through 'unofficial' avenues such as personal connections and financial corruption. Desire for higher education among the Igbo therefore helps to perpetuate social and cultural logics, also prevalent in wider society, that privilege kinship and corruption as means to achieve success. Third, my research focuses on the way in which the university functions internally and its direct relationship with society and the lives of 'ordinary' Nigerians, rather than its role in broader discussions around national development and politics. This focus therefore bypasses one unique characteristic of the university sector – its role in scrutinising government – and instead focuses on day-to-day practices that are found elsewhere in Nigerian public service bureaucracies. Last, Nigerian higher education is as much an arena of power struggles and political conflict as any other. It is not, as Amuwo (2002: 94) has sought to portray, an oasis of idealism, "a merchant of knowledge and an incubator of ideas of both heuristic and developmental value" far removed from the vulgar displays and power and politics of the "practical world". The Nigerian higher education sector displays many characteristics that are also seen in other arenas of the state and in wider society.

Despite these assertions, it is important to acknowledge that – though no institution is emblematic of the functioning of the state as a whole (Migdal, 2001; Olivier de Sardan, 2008) – African universities have some unique characteristics (Young, 1981; Mills, 2006). While the broad patterns of state-society relationship witnessed at USEN are likely to be replicated elsewhere in the Nigerian state apparatus (Smith, 2006), the university will also illustrate some exceptional features, such as some staff viewing the university as an institution with different values from the rest of society and the influence of political ideology over rhetoric and patterns of association.

The central goal of this research is to build a detailed analysis of the operation of the Nigerian 'everyday state' – the point at which Nigerian citizens meet the state on a daily basis – and its relationship with society. I achieve this through focusing particularly, though not solely, on the careers of students and academic staff – service users and providers – as they seek entry into, and passage through, a Nigerian university. Both of these groups make use of three different "currencies" (Bierschenk, 2008) – merit, personal connections and money – in order to achieve their goals. Each of these "currencies" can be viewed as representing a set of norms within Nigerian society: merit represents bureaucratic norms, personal connections represent 'traditional' patron-clientism and money represents the 'modern' emphasis on materialism and financial corruption as means to success. The precise way in which these three sets of norms intersect reveals much about the character of the modern Nigerian state.

In analysing these processes I critique aspects of the body of literature on African states that I have defined as neopatrimonial. I have chosen to give precedence to the neopatrimonial paradigm in my research for three reasons. First, as noted above, it is the dominant method of examining contemporary African states and therefore deserves in-depth analysis. Second, the paradigm tends to examine macro political systems, but

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<sup>3</sup> I will use this spelling throughout the thesis. Both this spelling and the alternative, Ibo, are frequently used in academic literature.

has rarely been employed to examine specific sets of circumstances (Therkildsen, 2005). Assessment of the neopatrimonial state concept will therefore be enhanced by critically examining its analytical utility in a specific micro-empirical context. Third, patronage and clientelism are important resources that are used by actors in the Nigerian higher education system to achieve success, and the system therefore has some of the characteristics that are most associated with neopatrimonial theory and analysis. This is acknowledged by both scholars adopting the neopatrimonial paradigm and those employing a micro-empirical approach (such as Smith, 2003, 2006; Olivier de Sardan, 2008), and is the reason that throughout this thesis I choose to retain an element of neopatrimonialism in my analysis, rather than rejecting the approach and its conclusions outright. However, though I argue that some of the conclusions it draws are correct, the approach still has major deficiencies, which I analyse here.

First, the literature adopts a unilinear logic that compares the actual functioning of African states with a western-style rational-legal state, either in the form of its Weberian ideal-type or European experience. The neopatrimonial approach views the Weberian ideal type, in which individuals access the public sector on the basis of meritocracy and impersonalisation and there is a clear dividing line between public and private spheres, as the only possible intellectual basis for a state. In doing so, it denies the opportunity to re-examine African state forms from any other perspective than that provided by mainstream development discourse. Separation of state and society, a key element of neopatrimonial state theory, is also a central attribute of this discourse (Abrahamsen, 2000: 63). Further, much literature concludes that, because many African states do not conform to this ideal type or to the legal frameworks bequeathed to them by colonialism, they must be deficient. The workings of African states are therefore assessed normatively and judged to be lacking. My approach is different. It seeks to examine the Nigerian state *as is* – phenomenological analysis – rather than as how outsiders suggest it *should be* – normative analysis. I make reference to the formal rules of the institution I have studied because ‘official’ and ‘unofficial’ norms and values constantly reform and reconstitute one another, as opposed to existing in entirely separate spheres. The role of ‘official’ rules in this thesis is therefore as an influence over actual behaviour as opposed to a yardstick through which to make normative judgments.

Second, much – though not all – neopatrimonial state scholarship views African culture and pre-colonial history as central influences over contemporary behaviour (see for instance Le Vine, 1980; Chabal and Daloz, 1999; Bayart, 1991, 2009; Bayart et al, 1999; Chabal, 2002). These scholars argue that the contemporary African crisis is part of a process of “retraditionalization” (Chabal and Daloz, 1999, Chabal, 2002) or a “return to the ‘heart of darkness’” (Bayart et al, 1999: 114) and therefore appear to suggest that, because contemporary African states are dysfunctional and owe their character primarily to pre-colonial norms, Africans are incapable of effective governance. I reject the assertion that contemporary African states are predominantly conditioned by pre-colonial experience and argue that the colonial period and process of decolonisation were critical ruptures in the history of African states and societies and have conditioned their contemporary character. These processes engendered a path dependence that has seen patterns that emerged during colonialism endure and intensify in the independence era. Other post-colonial phenomena, notably the oil boom, structural adjustment and military rule, have further contributed to contemporary

Nigeria's unique character. Any characteristics of pre-colonial modes of rule that do remain have been amalgamated to and suffused with colonial and post-colonial influences (Olivier de Sardan, 1999). In addition, many of the characteristics Chabal and Daloz argue represent retraditionalization – ethnically-based and ritualized violence – take place through interactions with the modern state (Gore and Pratten, 1993), and are mediated by these relationships.

Third, much neopatrimonial scholarship argues that African states are little more than façades and exist as vehicles for the personal advancement of state employees and their client groups. My empirical research suggests that, while informality does have a role in the Nigerian higher education system, there is a constant process of interpenetration between the formal, public realm and its informal counterpart. Official bureaucratic norms co-exist with and are suffused by norms rooted in patron-clientism and financial corruption. The key to understanding the process through which service users and providers navigate their way through the system is the relationship between these sets of norms. The state is therefore best viewed as a hybrid (Bratton and van de Walle, 1997) rather than a façade (Chabal and Daloz, 1999).

Fourth, the neopatrimonial state paradigm fails to take into account the importance of local morality due to its focus on the political system rather than the actors who make it up. Morality is at the core of the actions of Nigerians in relation to their state and understanding these actions requires analysis of the ethical decisions underpinning them. These decisions are based on a number of considerations: whether the perpetrator is an 'ordinary' member of society trying to make ends meet or a member of the elite; whether the person is seeking to help a member of their kin, community or other network or is seeking financial gain; related to the previous dichotomy, whether the fruits of the corruption are shared with the community or client group or kept for oneself; and lastly, whether the individual stands to gain or lose from the action. Importantly, this analysis must be "*from the actors' point of view*" (Olivier de Sardan, 1999: 25, original emphasis) and resist imposition of externally-inspired normative judgement.

My approach also facilitates discussion of a number of areas that illuminate patterns of behaviour in the Nigerian state and the drivers of social change that are neglected in other literature. These include: how does the Nigerian state provide services to its people? How do service providers and users interact with each other and what impact does this have on the nature of services provided? How do the careers of Nigerian academics evolve and what influences their evolution? This approach, with its micro-empirical focus, illustrates the fifth criticism of neopatrimonial state scholarship: its abstract nature and lack of empirical basis. This body of literature is described by social anthropologist Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan (2009: 39, original emphasis) as "*characterising*" the African state "without any means of apprehending its concrete reality as experienced on a daily basis by its civil servants and citizens". The same author goes on to argue that the neopatrimonial approach is based on "second-hand work, 'armchair' reflections and unconstrained impressionism" (ibid). What this critique suggests is that the neopatrimonial approach concentrates on the state as an entity imbued with certain characteristics but does not fully conceptualise the way it actually functions and is experienced by providers and users of its services. This type of detailed, empirically-grounded analysis is provided by my research.

In part, this critique is based on the fact that neopatrimonial state literature tends to assume that 'the state' refers only to the elite political arena (Bierschenk, 2008) and its approach is therefore reductionist as it denies political agency to all but the elite (Mustapha, 2002b). For many Africans, the behaviour of political elites does not exert as great an influence on their daily life as the point at which they meet the state, termed street-level (Lipsky, 1980) or interface (Olivier de Sardan, 2009) bureaucracies, and the actions of the staff they meet there: teachers, university lecturers, police officers, judges, lawyers, health workers and other public employees. Lipsky (1980: xii, original emphasis) argues persuasively that the actions of these workers "effectively *become* the public policy they carry out". Following Lipsky and Olivier de Sardan, my study aims to provide a corrective to the neopatrimonial approach by focusing on the concrete, day-to-day interactions between state and user.

Methodologically the thesis is based on the core ethnographic belief that social institutions are best understood through time spent within them and through establishing trusting relationships with 'ordinary' people. It is the experiences and understandings of those working and studying in Nigerian higher education, rather than policymakers and politicians, that enables true understanding of the university and its relationship with society. My research is therefore situated at the micro level, on the relationships between individuals and sets of values within the university itself and on the beliefs and understandings of these people about the place of the university in wider society. In focusing my gaze here I do not pretend that broader national or international factors are unimportant. However, I seek to understand one institution and its relationship with society. The best way to achieve this is to concentrate on the institution itself and the experiences and beliefs of those working and studying there.

The thesis is divided into five chapters, an introduction and conclusion. The first offers a literature review of African states, concentrating particularly on debates and discussions around neopatrimonial state literature. My analysis critiques this literature and argues for a different, less judgmental and abstract understanding of contemporary African states. The second chapter analyses the contemporary Nigerian state and its links to society and provides an historical overview of the factors that have influenced its character. The third chapter details my methodological approach. The fourth and fifth chapters provide a detailed analysis of the Nigerian higher education system and its relationship with society through analysis of material gathered during nine months of ethnographic fieldwork; chapter four deals with the experiences of students at USEN, while chapter five concentrates on staff. The thesis as a whole aims to analyse the Nigerian state using a non-normative, empirically-grounded approach.

# **Chapter 1: The African state**

## **Introduction**

Literature on African states is the site of great debate and often hostility. It can appear at times that the main goal of much writing is to rubbish the views of another scholar or viewpoint rather than to publish something new and original. Much of the controversy surrounds the corpus of writing that characterises the contemporary African state as neopatrimonial, a term first coined by Eisenstadt (1973), which focuses on the dysfunctional relationship between the official rules and actual functioning of the state. This chapter critically analyses this literature, arguing that the descriptions of African states provided by the neopatrimonial approach are useful but are insufficiently nuanced and omit significant divergences from the patrimonial 'norm'. Further, its analytical approach tends to be overly normative, abstract and pejorative, and it misunderstands historical influences on contemporary African states. As a result, a fundamentally reformed neopatrimonialism is required for a better understanding of contemporary African state and politics. It should also be noted that work I have described as neopatrimonialist includes some diversity of viewpoint. I critically analyse the contributions of different authors within this broad paradigm.

I draw on a range of literatures in my critique of neopatrimonial state scholarship, including the micro-empirical research of such authors as Olivier de Sardan (1999, 2008, 2009), Smith (2001, 2003, 2005, 2006), Bierschenk (2008), Blundo (2006) and Blundo and Olivier de Sardan (2006); the Africanist political science of Mustapha (2002a, 2002b, 2006), Murunga (2006) and Mkandawire (2003); and the deconstruction of development approach of Escobar (1995), Doty (1996) and Abrahamsen (2000). These bodies of literature provide alternative perspectives on the African state. Taken together, they allow a broad analysis of contemporary Africa that incorporates a variety of perspectives and facilitates a detailed and nuanced discussion, which the neopatrimonial approach lacks. Using these diverse literatures I will critically analyse the theory of neopatrimonialism and its application to contemporary African states.

In my review I outline African neopatrimonial state theory using contributions from a variety of scholars who have approached the subject from a similar perspective, which tends to be: macro, in that it examines systems as opposed to individuals; focused on the state's essence rather than the reality of its everyday functioning; focused on pre-colonial influences on contemporary behaviour as opposed to changes resulting from the colonial and postcolonial periods; unilinear, in that the Weberian-inspired rational-legal state is viewed as the gold standard to which all states must aspire; and normative, in that it is critical when states fail to achieve these standards. Some scholars emphasise particular elements more than others, and some omit one or more of these characteristics entirely. The goal of my analysis is to highlight those aspects of neopatrimonial state theory that contribute to a better understanding of the African state while rejecting, using critiques from the authors enumerated above and my own, elements that mislead or hamper this understanding.

## **The African neopatrimonial state**

Literature arguing that African states are run predominantly along personalistic and particularistic lines is dominant in recent political science literature (Samatar and

Samatar, 2002). Eyoh (1996) argues that this intellectual paradigm began with the publication of the World Bank's *Accelerated Development in Sub-Saharan Africa* (1981), which was critical of African states and helped usher in the period of structural adjustment that was designed to reduce their interventionist role. A large proportion of this type of literature characterises African states as neopatrimonial (Bratton and van de Walle, 1997; Chabal, 2002; Clapham, 1985; Englebert, 2002; Le Vine, 1980; Medard, 1982). Others label African states slightly differently: the lame leviathan (Callaghy, 1987); prebendal (Joseph, 1987); kleptocratic (Andreski, 1979); felonious (Bayart et al, 1999); the politics of the belly (Bayart, 2009); pathological patrimonialism (Ergas, 1986); and the political instrumentalization of disorder (Chabal and Daloz, 1999). I do not find this recourse to labelling particularly helpful because it reduces the complexity and diversity of African states to single concepts. Two of the foremost neopatrimonial state scholars, Chabal and Daloz (1999: xviii), also guard against reductionism:

It seems to be the enduring fate of Africa to be 'explained' in terms which are so ahistorical as to be risible – a lowering of analytical standards which we would reject out of hand if it were applied to the societies in which we, in the West, live. Would we, for instance, explain the conflict in Northern Ireland solely in terms of 'ancestral tribal hatreds' or political scandals in France exclusively in terms of 'the politics of the belly'?

This is a laudable sentiment, but unfortunately the authors then proceed to do exactly as they have advised others not to, by reducing contemporary African associational life to "the political instrumentalisation of disorder". This approach, described by Lund (2007: 2) as "catchy statement ... purchased at the expense of nuance" does little to advance our understanding of the complexity and diversity of the contemporary African state.

In this thesis I will use the term neopatrimonial state literature to describe the accounts enumerated above. Partly this is for the sake of expediency, but also because the central element of the neopatrimonial state paradigm – informal politics in a formal system and a lack of distinction between the public and private realms – dominates all these accounts. A few definitions of the term neopatrimonial state will illustrate this. Clapham (1985: 48) suggests a neopatrimonial state is "a form of organisation in which relationships of a broadly patrimonial type pervade a political and administrative system which is formally constructed on rational-legal grounds", while for Chabal and Daloz (1999: 16) the African state is "no more than a décor, a pseudo-western façade masking the realities of deeply personalised political relations". Slightly differently, Bratton and van de Walle (1997: 62) argue that neopatrimonial states are "those hybrid political systems in which the customs and patterns of patrimonialism co-exist with, and suffuse, rational-legal institutions". Medard (1982: 165) suggests that the advantage of the term neopatrimonialism is that it is "permits us to subsume not only clientelism, but also nepotism, ethnicity and corruption" into one catch-all term. I attempt to integrate elements of all these definitions in my discussion of the concept, and analyse the distinction between what I term 'absolute' neopatrimonial state scholars – those

arguing for the complete privatisation<sup>4</sup> of the public realm – and hybridists – those arguing that patrimonial and rational-legal norms interpenetrate – in more detail below.

At the core of the theory of the neopatrimonial state lies the contradiction between the official rules and the actual functioning of the state. All African neopatrimonial states operate in systems that are formally based on ‘modern’ structures: their political systems were adopted wholesale by indigenous elites at independence and are therefore based on the systems that were used to run African countries during the colonial era. No attempt was made by the new leaders to adopt traditional forms of sovereignty (Englebert, 2002), the pre-colonial experience of African statecraft (Mustapha, 2006) or any of the supernatural elements of pre-colonial African governance (Ottenberg, 1967). A significant motivation for this, however, was the insistence of the outgoing Europeans that “the Africans display their political credentials according to the rules of the metropolitan political game, that is individual representation, party politics and parliamentary regime” (Chabal, 1992: 204). In the first part of this chapter I will sketch out the main aspects of the theory of the African neopatrimonial state, as outlined by the authors enumerated above, concentrating on three core elements of the theory: the operation of the neopatrimonial state; the epistemological and methodological approach of the neopatrimonial state paradigm; and the origins of the neopatrimonial state, including considerations on the role of culture in African states.

### ***The operation of the neopatrimonial state***

The first element of the neopatrimonial argument I assess here is its analysis of the functioning of contemporary African states. The lack of distinction between the public and private sectors forms the central plank of the theory. In its ideal-type form, the rational-legal state – upon which those political and bureaucratic apparatuses bequeathed to postcolonial African leaders are based – is posited on the idea of complete separation between public and private spheres. In such a system, the bureaucrat is the servant of elected government, which makes decisions for the good of the nation-state (Parkin, 2002). The official exercises the powers of his or her office and treats each individual, be they superiors, subordinates or the public, impersonally. Outside the workplace, he or she is a private individual with ambitions and obligations, but is “unable to use his [or her] public position to achieve them” (Clapham, 1985: 45). The individual bureaucrat advances up the system by performing his or her duties correctly and efficiently. The bureaucratic system is entirely rule-bound and the individual bureaucrat is expected not to either allow personal motives to influence decision-making nor show any individual initiative or subjective reasoning (Mommsen, 1989). The bureaucratic system is rigidly hierarchical, and “everything depends only on formal regulations and the specific orders of superiors” (ibid: 113). What makes such a system work is the fact that the bureaucracy works towards goals that are publicly accepted and the bureaucracy is viewed as the most efficient means of achieving these goals (Clapham, 1985).

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<sup>4</sup> Throughout this thesis I will use the term privatise to refer to the way in which the state is used to advance the personal fortunes of those working for it and their clients, rather than the policy of privatisation – transfer of government functions to the private sector – which has a different meaning.

The neopatrimonial state is different, because the distinction between the public and private realms is not upheld in practice. There is, however, some disagreement within neopatrimonial state scholarship as to how this lack of distinction manifests itself: whether the public realm is wholly subordinated to particularistic demands or whether rational-legal logics continue to exert an influence. Some neopatrimonial state scholars suggest that, in Africa, states are marked by the wholesale privatisation of the public sector (Medard, 1982: 177), or are little more than a mask for politics carried out on the basis of personal connections (Chabal and Daloz, 1999; Booth et al, 2006). In systems like this, the theory goes, those with access to state resources do not use them for the public good, but that of a small proportion – the official's associates or client group – a phenomenon Joseph (1987) terms prebendalism. These authors therefore suggest the coexistence of two separate spheres of society: the bureaucratic and the patrimonial. The bureaucratic realm makes the rules, but these rules are not enforced because personalistic, informal politics prevails. The only role for the public sector is as a vehicle for private advancement and accumulation. Ekeh (1975), who could not be termed a neopatrimonial state scholar, nonetheless argues similarly that there are two distinct realms and that different moral imperatives operate in each realm. He asserts (1975: 92, original emphasis) that in African post-colonial societies there are two public realms, the “primordial public”, which corresponds broadly to ethnicity and community of origin, is “moral”, while the “civic public”, which refers to the post-colonial state, is “*amoral and lacks the generalized moral imperatives operative in the private realm and in the primordial public*”. In Ekeh's conceptualisation the “civic public” – the state – is privatised, in that it is viewed as legitimate to “rob” from it in order to benefit the “primordial public” (1975: 108). However, contrary to the viewpoint of most neopatrimonial state scholars, the root of this dichotomy is colonialism. This is a key difference, as many neopatrimonial scholars assert the primacy of pre-colonial influences over contemporary behaviour, while scholars from other perspectives tend to focus their attention on colonial and post-colonial influences or on the syncretic origins of contemporary patterns of politics.

A second viewpoint is that neopatrimonial states are hybrid states (Bratton and van de Walle, 1997), in that their defining feature is “the *simultaneous* operations of patrimonial and legal-rational logics” (Therkildsen, 2005: 37, original emphasis). For Erdmann and Engel (2007: 104, original emphasis), an understanding of contemporary Africa that concentrates solely on unofficial relations is misleading:

An understanding of politics in Africa which depicts *all* official relations as privatised or the *modus operandi* as being *essentially* informal does not reflect African realities. What we want to emphasise here is that there is more than a legal-rational façade. It is a daily experience that *not all* political and administrative decisions are taken according to informal rules determined by private or personal interests.

For these authors, therefore, neopatrimonialism is not marked by informal politics in a formal system but by the interrelationships between these two realms. Erdmann and Engel (2007: 105) argue further that “the patrimonial penetrates the legal-rational system and twists its logic, functions, and output”. In addition to remarking on the continued importance of rational-legal norms in influencing behaviour, these authors therefore also comment on the way in which the two spheres interpenetrate. The argument in favour of interpenetration of spheres is also advanced by Zolberg (1968:



71), who argues that the political systems of independent African states are syncretic, meaning that there are two distinct spheres of society – the “traditional” and the “modern” – but “amalgamation and integration is being attempted”. Blundo (2006) points out that rules are constantly being negotiated and manipulated so the border between the legal and the illicit becomes fuzzy, while Olivier de Sardan (2009: 67) argues that the most strident arguments concerning state privatisation advanced by neopatrimonial state authors are false:

[T]hese states are not “disintegrated” or phantom states ... The public service survives, albeit only in cobbled together and shaky forms; this should not be forgotten. These states are paradoxical and ambiguous, ranging between increasing informal privatisation and universally acknowledge (sic) appalling quality of public service, on the one hand, and an undeniable capacity to reproduce somehow and succeed in maintaining a minimal level of public activities, on the other.

Olivier de Sardan (2009), who, like me, argues that African states have some neopatrimonial characteristics but disagrees with the neopatrimonial state paradigm, further suggests that there are likely to be individuals within systems such as these who do not respond in any way to patrimonial motivations, though they are rare and, as Kohli (2004) points out, their “official” goals are likely to be thwarted by structural constraints. Medard (1982: 183) acknowledges that there may be some role for concepts such as “public service or general interest” in neopatrimonial systems but that the effect of this is minimal: “[n]o real policy can be conducted; no programme can be implemented” (ibid). Clapham (1985: 46) similarly comments that there may be individual bureaucrats who conform to the rules, but nonetheless his overall conclusion is that “formal rational-legal criteria are a very inadequate guide to [officials’] behaviour”. Those who play by the official rules often find themselves marginalised or, as Olivier de Sardan (2009) comments, embittered. Tidjani Alou (2006) terms these individuals “oases of integrity”, but I reject this terminology for its normative content: within the context of public service in Africa, showing integrity may mean carrying out one’s work according to the job description, but it may equally mean using the benefits of the job to assist one’s kin, community or client group, as Ekeh (1975) has outlined in detail. Indeed, seizing corrupt opportunities may allow for a “manifestation of cardinal virtues, such as generosity, largesse and gratitude, to all those who in the past, when you were unimportant, weak, in need, provided help, encouragement and support” (Olivier de Sardan, 1999: 43).

Two authors who do not come from the neopatrimonial school argue for a third approach to the existence of distinct realms, suggesting that in Africa the public sector is not wholly privatised, nor is it witnessing interpenetration of the formal and informal spheres. In their view there is no line dividing the ‘traditional’ and the ‘modern’. Murunga (2006: 29) argues that “the two realms interpenetrate in complex ways in Africa: they do so in such a way as to render the dichotomy a mockery of reality”. He goes on to suggest that those scholars who divide Africa into competing realms do so in order to “locate African problems exclusively in the local terrain” (ibid). Smith (2006: 12-13) argues similarly that most Nigerians experience the twin realms of modern liberal democracy and traditional patron-clientism “as one reality” because they live in the worlds of “modern liberal democracy and traditional systems of kinship and patron-clientism” (ibid: 12) simultaneously.

In arguments about the separation (or lack of it) between public and private realms, there is therefore significant disagreement, though the vast majority of neopatrimonial state authors argue for the existence of two entirely separate realms. Bratton and van de Walle (1997) are the only authors in my literature review who do not. Therkildsen (2005) and Erdmann and Engel (2007), both of whom argue for the interpenetration of realms, are not proponents of the neopatrimonial state paradigm. Instead they seek, like me, to assess the strength of neopatrimonial state claims rather than advancing them.

Neopatrimonial state literature focuses much of its attention on the workings of African political systems, particularly the operation of the highest levels of politics and policymaking (such as Bratton and van de Walle, 1997; Chabal and Daloz, 1999; Roth, 1968; Booth et al, 2006), thus equating the state with the political regime in power or with political elites (Bierschenk, 2008). Politics is therefore “reduced to the world of kleptocrats, criminals and cranks; the people, however defined, are missing” (Mustapha, 2002b: 3). This body of literature also fails to take into account the diversity of ways that the state functions, both within and across sectors (Migdal, 2001). Aside from occasional, often anecdotal, references, this body of literature fails to address the character of and influences on interface or street-level bureaucracies, instead focusing on the elite political level. Obviously the highest realms of politics *do* influence the way Africans experience political life, but their direct contact with the state through the use of public services is what directly influences their access to daily needs – for education, healthcare and permission to drive a car, to trade or to buy land. The policies promulgated at the national level are only given meaning by the street-level bureaucrats who implement them locally (Lipsky, 1980).

Neopatrimonial state literature’s focus on the actions of political elites suggests a particular conceptualisation of what makes up a state. It argues that state-society relations are influenced predominantly at this level. This is similar to the viewpoint of Achebe (1983: 1) in his now-famous analysis of *The Trouble With Nigeria*, which he argues is “simply and squarely a failure of leadership”. This view was shared by many of my respondents in Nigeria, who routinely ascribed the country’s ills to its leaders. Since independence, Nigeria and many other African countries have suffered through poor leadership. But focusing solely on this arena inevitably omits large swathes of contemporary African life, and implicitly suggests that ‘the state’ is made up solely of elites. ‘Ordinary’ people are therefore both ignored and deprived of any agency of their own (Mustapha, 2002b).

There is significantly less literature, and none of the neopatrimonial type, on the day-to-day workings of street-level bureaucracies in Africa. There are a number of reasons underlying this trend. First, neopatrimonialism is a theory emanating from political science, which tends to concern itself more at the level of politics than service provision, and more on macro systems than micro functionings. Second, anthropology, the discipline that might be more expected to examine such arenas, has historically been more concerned with “‘primitive’ and colonized societies, villages, fraternities and sects” (Olivier de Sardan, 2005: 42) than ‘modern’ phenomena such as health and education provision, though in recent years anthropologists have begun to engage with the topic (Blundo, 2006; Blundo and Olivier de Sardan, 2006, 2009; Haller and Shore, 2005; Olivier de Sardan, 1999; Smith, 2001, 2003, 2005, 2006). Olivier de Sardan

(2009: 40, my emphasis) suggests that understanding the daily functioning of the African state requires examination of *political science topics using socio-anthropological methods*. This provides a pithy summary of the focus of this research.

Understanding street-level interaction is important for my research because its empirical basis is the operation of a university, a key aspect of public service provision in Nigeria. Moreover, public service provision is a vital aspect of the operation of a state because it is usually the point at which the state meets the service user. Blundo (2006: 799) raises a number of questions related to this arena that neopatrimonial state literature does not address:

How does the African state work in reality? How do public administrations function in everyday life? How are they staffed? What are their means and constraints of action, and what actual services do they provide? What forms of interaction exist between the public services and their users? Who – sociologically speaking – are the civil servants of today, and how do they perceive their functions? ... The Africanist literature in social sciences posts a weird silence on these questions.

Some of these questions are addressed by Olivier de Sardan, a social anthropologist and perhaps the foremost scholar on contemporary African interface bureaucracy. He identifies a number of characteristics that he argues are at work in the interface bureaucracies of Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Mali, Niger and Senegal, all in Francophone Africa, but suggests that it is difficult to judge whether these characteristics might be found in Central or Southern Africa or in Anglophone or Lusophone Africa. These characteristics are: clientelism, the wide divergence between the formal rules and actual behaviour, "every-man-for-himself-ism", suspicion, "privilegism", contempt for anonymous users, the generalised exchange of favours, systemic corruption, a "culture of impunity", lack of motivation among civil servants, unproductiveness, and doublespeak (Olivier de Sardan, 2009: 44-52). There is undoubtedly some crossover between these conclusions and those of neopatrimonial state scholars, but what is striking is the depth of understanding of day-to-day activities that Olivier de Sardan's work illustrates. The empirical basis of his work is much stronger than many neopatrimonial state authors, and his focus at the interface level provides a much clearer understanding of the African state as it is experienced by its citizens.

A key aspect of the work of street-level bureaucrats is client differentiation. The highly pressurised nature of much work in public sector bureaucracies means that street-level bureaucrats often use favouritism and unequal treatment as ways of coping with the demands of the job, and divide their clients into those deemed "worthy" and "unworthy" (Lipsky 1980: 153). This finding links closely with Olivier de Sardan's comments about contempt for anonymous users – in that they do not know anyone within the bureaucracy – though a key distinction between Lipsky's and Olivier de Sardan's findings is that those deemed "unworthy" in Lipsky's research are uncooperative or unresponsive, while in Olivier de Sardan's work they lack a personal connection. In African states this is likely to be more pronounced than in Lipsky's research in the US, as there is likely to be increased pressure to support a particular client group, whether this group is made up of kin, community members, members of one's ethnic group or friends (Clapham, 1985; Joseph, 1987; Medard, 1982).

### *Corruption in neopatrimonial states*

An important aspect of behaviour in neopatrimonial systems is corruption (Medard, 1982; Chabal and Daloz, 1999; Kohli, 2004; Clapham, 1985; Englebert, 2002). I discuss it in detail here for a number of reasons. First, it is an important aspect of the neopatrimonial characterisation of African states. Second, it is one of the three factors – along with merit, which can be viewed as representing bureaucratic norms, and personal connections, which can be viewed as representing norms of patron-clientism – that influence the success or failure of individuals at the University of South Eastern Nigeria, the subject of this study. Third, it is so prevalent in most African states that understanding the workings of public bureaucracies is almost impossible without considering it. In the Nigerian case, Smith (2006: xiv) argues that “explaining [corruption] is central to understanding the very fabric of Nigerian society”.

It is important as a researcher to consider corruption in as value-neutral way as possible. If corruption is assessed morally it is important that this should involve examination of corruption from the point of view of the actors involved (Olivier de Sardan, 1999) rather than the outsider researcher, a problem with much anti-corruption discourse (Harrison, 2006). One must be careful not to engage in “shifting the responsibility for corruption to local cultures” (Blundo and Olivier de Sardan, 2006: 96) or “blaming the victim” (Smith, 2006: 6). Smith (2006: 26) goes on to argue against “deflecting the responsibility for the injustices of the contemporary world from the haves to the have-nots, whether that means from rich to poor countries or from the elites in poor countries to their largely poor populations”. These considerations have led anthropologists to be wary of studying corruption for fear of being branded ethnocentric (Blundo and Olivier de Sardan, 2006: 22). It is notable that these concerns are articulated by those using a socio-anthropological, micro-empirical approach and are not shared by scholars from political science, in particular those of the neopatrimonial school.

A number of scholars have pointed out the existence of different types of corruption. The first main dichotomy is that of scale: between ‘petty’ and ‘grand’ corruption. Grand corruption refers to that perpetrated by those at the highest levels of politics, business and the military, and often involves the expropriation of millions, sometimes even billions, of pounds. Petty corruption, by contrast, generally occurs at the point where the individual service user meets the state. Data collected during my fieldwork, which I discuss in greater depth in chapters four and five, suggests that grand corruption is viewed negatively by the vast majority of Nigerians, and is often noted as one of the main causes of the country’s ills. Petty corruption, by contrast, is viewed as much more socially acceptable, though the attitude of each individual to corrupt practice is likely to be dependent on a number of factors, which I discuss in chapter two. In part the negative view of grand corruption is the product of Nigerians’ tendency to blame leaders for the country’s problems. Those at the highest echelons of politics are subject to particular ire because their corruption is perceived to be financially-based, whereas much petty corruption involves supporting kin (Clapham, 1985; Smith, 2005). However, this moral distinction is not clear-cut. Chabal and Daloz (2006) suggest that even high-level financial corruption may be viewed positively provided the actors involved redistribute a sufficient proportion of their gains to their followers (see Smith, 2006: 223 for a similar argument).

The second dichotomy is based on the distinction noted above: between corruption conducted on the basis of “kinship, affection, caste, and so forth” (Scott, 1969) and on the basis of purely financial considerations. Scott (1969) terms these “parochial” and “market” corruption respectively, while Andreski (1979) uses the terms “solidaristic” and “egoistic” graft. In his discussion of corruption in Nigeria, Smith (2006) argues that more ‘modern’, individually-based corruption known in Nigeria as 419<sup>5</sup> is on the increase at the expense of ‘traditional’ kin and community-based corruption that is rooted in patron-client relationships. Blundo and Olivier de Sardan (2006: 5), however, suggest that it can be difficult to identify a clear boundary between these two types of corruption.

These practices are often analysed in moral terms, both by the actors involved and by African state scholars. As with some other aspects of African state discourse, there is overlap between neopatrimonial state scholars and others, though, again, there are important differences. Authors from a number of perspectives argue that, according to local morality, achieving public office requires the office-holder to distribute largesse to his supporters (Ekeh, 1975; Isichei, 1976; Joseph, 1987; Smith, 2006; Olivier de Sardan, 1999; Chabal and Daloz, 1999, 2006). Not to do so would be viewed as “either inept or selfish” (Chabal and Daloz, 1999: 103). Olivier de Sardan (1999) suggests that practices such as these are part of a “moral economy” of corruption in Africa, which he views in terms of social norms that “communicate with or influence the practices of corruption” (1999: 26). He centres his discussion around the idea of certain “logics” – negotiation, gift-giving, the solidarity network, predatory authority and redistributive accumulation – and the way in which they influence corrupt practice. Importantly, however, Olivier de Sardan examines corruption in contemporary Africa non-normatively, and seeks to examine these processes from the point of view of those involved. This approach is similar to my own, and I provide a deeper analysis of the position of morality in relation to state-society relations in Nigeria in chapter two.

### *Factionalism in neopatrimonial states*

Factionalism refers to competition for power and prestige between “structurally and functionally similar groups” (Brumfiel, 1994: 4) that takes place in many different arenas – particularly political parties but also “bureaucracies, local authorities, chiefdoms, trade unions, employers’ organizations and even Christian Churches, Islamic brotherhoods, so called ‘independent’ religious movements or sects” (Bayart, 1991: 40) – of African social and political life. Nicholas (1977: 57-58) suggests that there are five characteristics of factions: they engage in conflict; are political; are not corporate groups, meaning that they are “basically impermanent” (ibid: 58); their members are recruited by a leader; and members are recruited on diverse principles. I will use a combination of the definitions provided by Brumfiel and Nicholas in this thesis, though I will also discuss important debates around other characteristics of factions, notably the importance of ideology in factional conflict. Factionalism has received little attention in the context of African and Nigerian state and society compared to concepts such as

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<sup>5</sup> The term 419 originates from the section of the Nigerian legal code referring to advance-fee fraud. This is a specific type of fraud in which the target is enticed into paying advance fees against the promise of a much larger pay-off later. Within Nigeria the term now has a far broader meaning, encompassing anything that uses illusion or manipulation of the truth to facilitate personal advancement. I discuss 419 in more detail in chapter two.

patronage, clientelism and corruption, and is not as integral an aspect of neopatrimonial state literature as these concepts. I discuss it here because it is an important aspect of my empirical findings.

Only one author of the neopatrimonial school, Jean-François Bayart,<sup>6</sup> studies the primacy of factions in Africa. Bayart (2009: 211) notes that “at bottom, ... actors organise themselves in factions in order to win or conserve power at the various echelons of the social pyramid, and this competition is the very stuff of political life”. A number of other authors, both using the neopatrimonial approach and from other perspectives, examine factionalism in Africa, though the majority of writing (such as Medard, 1982; Lemarchand, 1987; Joseph, 1987; Jega, 2000) concerns its application in politics, both at high and lower levels, as opposed to public service provision, the subject of my study. Further, a number of studies (such as Paul, 2007; Young, 1981; Cohen, 1980) note the ethnic nature of factionalism. Only two authors, Bayart (1991, 2009) and Lemarchand (1987), address the topic in and of itself, rather than viewing factionalism as an element of wider discussions of clientelism or ethnic conflict. Lemarchand (1987) notes the fluidity and opportunism of factions, which reflects my experience at USEN, though he too concentrates on the roles of factions and factionalism in politics as opposed to their existence in public service bureaucracy. Within micro-empirical accounts of public service bureaucracies in Nigeria and elsewhere in West Africa, analysis of factions, their operation, impact and historical antecedents, is conspicuously absent. Smith, who spent a number of years working in Nigerian universities, does not mention their existence in his numerous writings on patronage and corruption in Nigeria, while Olivier de Sardan (2009) touches on the subject very briefly, viewing factionalism as part of broader patterns of clientelism. One piece of micro-empirical research that provides a detailed view of the way a faction operates, how it is made up and who benefits is that carried out by Auyero (2000) in Argentina. His research characterises factions as “problem-solving networks” or “informal networks of survival” (ibid: 83), referring to the way in which the primary role of the faction is functional: in this case, a way in which poor people can ensure their survival in a harsh environment. For many, though not all, faction members at USEN this succinctly summarises the motivation for joining. However, Auyero too concentrates on factions in the political arena as opposed to public service bureaucracy. In most literature of the neopatrimonial approach, factionalism is viewed as little more than an element of neopatrimonial states, and receives recognition but not analysis. Understanding of African states, and particularly interface bureaucracies, would benefit greatly from empirical research on factions and their functions.

#### *The operation of the neopatrimonial state: concluding remarks*

In this section I have sought to sketch out the way neopatrimonial state scholars and those outside this school have characterised contemporary African states. There is some overlap between arguments made by scholars of the neopatrimonial approach and others, particularly in the acknowledgement that African states have neopatrimonial characteristics such as patronage and corruption. However, two important distinctions exist. First, the vast majority of neopatrimonial state scholars

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<sup>6</sup> Jean-François Bayart's contribution to the study of African politics and society is broad and diverse and to label this work neopatrimonial is something of an oversimplification. Nonetheless some of his writing contains some strongly neopatrimonial arguments.

argue that 'modern', 'official' norms and 'traditional', 'unofficial' norms exist in separate spheres, the former representing the legal framework and the latter the state's actual functioning. They argue that the official rules have no bearing on actual behaviour because the state functions only for the particularistic advancement of those working for it and their client groups. By contrast, those employing a micro-empirical approach acknowledge the diversity of the state in action and argue that behaviour is motivated by a combination of patrimonial and rational-legal norms. There are two spheres, but they are engaged in a constant process of reform and reconstitution of one another. As a result the state still functions, albeit in an inefficient and sometimes shaky manner. Second, though both neopatrimonial and micro-empirical scholars note the existence of neopatrimonial characteristics in contemporary African states, they choose to analyse them differently. In particular there are significant differences in their epistemological and methodological approach and their historical analysis. I analyse these distinctions in turn below.

### ***The neopatrimonial state: epistemological and methodological critiques***

The second element I will discuss here concerns the assumptions and methodology of the neopatrimonial state paradigm and its relationship to the overall body of scholarship on African states and societies. This analysis incorporates three different elements. The first critiques the normative essence of neopatrimonial state scholarship; the second criticises the tendency to see African states through a neo-colonialist lens and to disallow visions of these states that do not correspond to orthodox western viewpoints; the third critically appraises neopatrimonial state scholarship for its abstract nature and lack of empirical basis.

My first criticism is that the neopatrimonial paradigm suggests that the African state is deficient because it does not meet the lofty aims of the Weberian rational-legal ideal type or mirror the historical experiences of European states. This suggestion is problematic for a number of reasons. First, there is a unilinear assumption, inherited from modernisation theory, that the western-style rational-legal state is the starting point from which any analysis must stem. Chabal (2002: 460) argues that "the manner in which power is exercised in Africa is in contradiction with modern democracy as it is conceived in the west". But why should it be otherwise, given the different histories of the two continents? In his analysis of Nigeria, Kohli (2004) compares Nigeria's lack of a "modernizing state" with transitions to "modern" statehood in Europe, two fundamentally different sets of circumstances. A number of other authors (such as Clapham, 1985; Callaghy, 1987; Englebert, 2002) make these kinds of comparisons. However, as Theobald (1999: 492) argues, the "West's historical experience is distinctive, unique and unrepeatable [but] this experience continues to provide the model of the 'modern' state to which premodern or less developed forms must aspire". There is no space within neopatrimonial analysis for a vision of alternative state forms that take into account African history and contemporary African culture (Samatar and Samatar, 2002). In addition, their analysis does not compare like with like: it seeks to compare African political systems, which had the ideals of a Weberian rational-legal state foisted upon them through colonialism, with European states where this type of politics developed over hundreds of years (Englebert, 1997; Kelsall, 2008).

Furthermore, the Weberian conceptualisation is an ideal type, and western polities do not conform to it either (Clapham, 1985; van de Walle, 2007). Indeed, Roth (1968: 197-

198) argues that Weber himself analysed bureaucracies and modern higher civil servants as “status groups and vested interests”. There are a number of characteristics of ‘modern’ western political systems that have similar characteristics to African neopatrimonial states, such as the old boys’ networks that influence employment access on the basis of personal connections, or ‘machine’ politics in the United States. Further, many East Asian states that have been particularly developmentally successful in the last 30 or so years have also witnessed high levels of corruption, a central characteristic of the African neopatrimonial state, yet have not been so derided for it. While there are differences in the extent and type of corruption, it is still necessary to question a discourse that presents African political systems as fundamentally different from their counterparts elsewhere in the world.

For Mamdani (1996) the problem lies in the comparison between contemporary Africa and the Europe of two to four hundred years ago. Once again, however, the critique is the same: African development is compared with something different and, in doing so, the uniqueness of the case is lost. As the same author (1996: 12) eloquently puts it:

[T]he outcome [of historical comparison] is history by analogy rather than history as process. Analogy seeking turns into a substitute for theory formation. The Africanist is akin to those learning a foreign language who must translate every new word back into their mother tongue, in the process missing precisely what is new in a new experience.

The second criticism of neopatrimonial scholarship, which can be termed the neo-colonialist critique, can be divided into two, the first appraising neopatrimonial state scholars explicitly and the second critiquing mainstream development discourse as a whole, of which the neopatrimonial approach is an aspect. Those advancing the first critique are African, while the vast majority of scholars supporting the theory of the neopatrimonial state are non-African. The intellectual thrust of the neopatrimonial paradigm therefore comes from outsiders. There is, of course, no reason to suggest that African scholarship of Africa is inherently superior to that of outsiders, but the trenchant nature of the critique of neopatrimonial scholarship is worthy of analysis. African scholars are particularly critical of the five authors who have written two controversial works in the *African Issues* series: Chabal and Daloz’s (1999) *Africa Works* and Bayart, Ellis and Hibou’s (1999) *The Criminalization of the State in Africa*. A number of African intellectuals (such as Samatar and Samatar, 2002; Murunga, 2006; Mustapha, 2002b; Mkandawire, 2003) have commented that these works are pejorative and unhelpful, and that their authors have found their work “heavily shunned in Africa” (Murunga, 2006: 28). Mustapha (2002a: 151) accuses Bayart et al of racism and arrogance because they suggest that, among other things, “the ‘social capital’ of Africa appears to display a marked affinity with the spirit of criminality” (2002b), while Murunga (2006: 28-29) argues that Chabal and Daloz’s (1999) retraditionalization thesis is a contemporary manifestation of colonialism’s “civilising mission”:

Notions of re-traditionalisation draw from a logic of the civilising mission which, until the 1940s, defined European incursions on the continent. Built around an anthropological reading of African institutions and its cultures, this mission questioned the humanity of Africans, justified their colonisation and posed this domination as an engine of modernising the natives. Colonial modernisation became Africa’s path from the heart of darkness to modernity. Its unilinear logic was the basis of



developmentalism ... In *Criminalization of the State*, Bayart et al speak of Africa's return to the heart of darkness, while in *Africa Works*, Chabal and Daloz write about the instrumentalisation of disorder as a plausible re-traditionalisation of society. It takes a bold Africanist to commit such notions to paper in this world of political correctness.

These are extremely strong criticisms, and situate neopatrimonial state scholarship within an earlier history of academe that sought to belittle and dehumanise Africans. Some contentions – such as the connection between “moral and political codes of behaviour” in Africa and criminality (Bayart, 1999: 34) and Chabal and Daloz's (1999: 128) contention that the reason Africa has failed to develop is due to African “cultural features” or even, more alarmingly, “mentalities” – come very close to ascribing characteristics to Africans that are explicitly pejorative and condemnatory and implicitly primordial and unchanging. These arguments do not adequately conceptualise the complexity of African societies or the factors that have influenced their development.

The second part of the neo-colonial critique is broader and does not criticise the neopatrimonial school of thought specifically, but instead argues that mainstream development discourse presents a vision that is normative and reductionist and creates a particular type of reality, based on western epistemology and economics, which disallows other types of understanding (Escobar, 1995). By mainstream development discourse I refer to those approaches that draw heavily on modernisation theory and have found practical expression in the work of international organisations such as the World Bank and other institutions that approach development using this paradigm, which has largely been accepted by donors and creditors in the North and is viewed as the model that the South – including Africa – should follow (Abrahamsen, 2000). Though there are different approaches to development and to African states and politics, some of which I describe and analyse in this thesis, this approach is dominant in both discourse and action. I conceptualise the neopatrimonial paradigm as the version of this dominant approach that deals specifically with African states. The dominance of both the broader and narrower paradigms has resulted in a situation where it is difficult to think about the ‘Third World’ or the African state except through this discourse. In this section I will sketch the critiques of the orthodox development discourse and argue why neopatrimonialist writings fall firmly within this canon.

Doty (1996) argues that discourses of development have constructed Southern states only in terms of Northern experience and present the South as an inferior ‘other’. Neopatrimonialist scholarship falls squarely within this discourse for a number of reasons. First, neopatrimonialist literature (such as Kohli, 2004; Chabal, 2002; Clapham, 1985) conceptualises Weberian rationalism as the only possible solution to underdevelopment, which is itself conceptualised in reductionist terms, such as simple economic growth for Ergas (1986), Chabal and Daloz (1999) and Chabal (2002). Southern (in this case African) states are set up as failures because they have not achieved these goals.

Second, Doty explicitly criticises Jackson and Rosberg's (1982) argument suggesting that African states are little more than quasi states, a thesis with significant similarities to the neopatrimonial state discourse. She argues that Jackson and Rosberg set up a binary between “real” and “quasi” states, in which the latter represents “inability to

handle power and authority responsibly and humanely, incapacity for self-government, general incompetence" (1996: 152). All the characteristics of African states are viewed by Jackson and Rosberg not as attributes to be analysed for their own sake, but as negative versions of something else. The problem is that they therefore conceptualise development in unreservedly normative terms. The fact that western and African modes of governance are different deserves acknowledgement and analysis, but presenting Africa only as a deficient version of the west prevents analysis of the particularities of the African case. Analysis of contemporary African states should be possible "without invoking the hierarchical oppositions reminiscent of the superior/inferior classifications that have justified the practices characteristic of earlier imperial encounters" (Doty, 1996: 161).

Practices such as this are justified by the neopatrimonial body of writing, which, by explicitly and implicitly stating that African states are inferior to their western counterparts, becomes "an intrinsic part of the technologies of power employed in international politics and [a method through] which the North maintains and legitimises its continued power and hegemony in the South" (Abrahamsen, 2000: ix). In the same way as Murunga above, Bhabha (1990: 75) argues that the development discourse is governed along the same principles as the colonial discourse, the objective of which was to "construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction". The intellectual precursor to arguments such as this is Said's *Orientalism* (1978), which outlined the way in which Europeans imbued 'Orientals' with particular characteristics in order to deal with them effectively. The argument that Africans are described in such negative ways in order to justify neo-colonial domination is given increased credibility by the writings of two scholars who come from the neopatrimonial school, Joseph (2002) and Ellis (2005), both of whom recommend new forms of external intervention in the affairs of African states. Joseph advocates "smart partnerships" between African countries and outsiders to train Africans, while Ellis recommends "international trusteeship", which could easily be interpreted as a modern form of colonialism, though Ellis does not provide enough detail to assess such a claim. The subtext of both these analyses is of African incompetence.

The third critique of neopatrimonial state theory I will discuss concerns its methodology, particularly its lack of empirical basis and consequent abstractness. Olivier de Sardan (2008) argues that the approach I have described as neopatrimonial suffers from overgeneralisation and a tendency towards reductionism by reducing African states to simple characteristics. Patronage and clientelism undoubtedly exist in contemporary African states, "yet the truth is that the multiple divergences between norms and practices ... cannot be subsumed so quickly under a single concept. The forms and modalities must first be explored and the nuances and variants identified" (Olivier de Sardan, 2008: 6). In short, this critique argues that the neopatrimonial approach shows a lack of understanding of the intricacies of how the state actually functions for its citizens, which is the product of its lack of empirical basis. It fails to take into account the different level of service provided by different arenas of the state and suffers from its emphasis on viewing state systems as opposed to the actors who make the state what it is. Theobald (1982) has also been critical of the use of the concept of patrimonialism in political science writings, arguing that it purports to explain behaviour

in radically different political systems, therefore reducing its analytical utility. Further, there is a tendency for neopatrimonial state scholars to situate their analysis at the highest levels, but to make anecdotal points about the functioning of bureaucracy at lower levels (such as Bayart, 1991; Bratton and van de Walle, 1997; Medard, 1982). The tendency towards generalisation (see for instance Callaghy, 1987; Clapham, 1985; Chabal, 2002; Medard, 1982) also points to the lack of empirical basis of this approach.

Despite Olivier de Sardan's concern that neopatrimonial state theory concentrates on "essence" rather than "reality", it is important not to lose sight of the fact that there are a number of similarities between the conclusions drawn about the actual functioning of Nigerian states by Olivier de Sardan and those he seeks to criticise. Indeed, the same author (2008: 4) argues that "real governance" in Africa – the "manner in which public services are really delivered" – is infused with neopatrimonial and clientelist characteristics, and (2009: 41) suggests a convergence of governance forms in the countries he studies, similar to Chabal (2002), whose work is among those Olivier de Sardan criticises. Smith (2003: 707), another anthropologist, describes the pressure on Nigerian bureaucrats to behave in a prebendal manner. In addition, many of the more general conclusions on state function drawn by these two micro-empirical scholars and their colleagues (such as Blundo, 2006) bear a striking similarity to those drawn by scholars of the neopatrimonial school. There is, however, a key difference, and it lies in the subtlety and groundedness of the former compared to the generalisation and broad-brush theorising of the latter. The long-term empirical research of the micro-empirical approach provides a much more solid basis for analysis than the seemingly thin, impressionistic neopatrimonial method.

My observations here are not intended to be critical of these anthropologists because my research reaches precisely the same conclusions. In addition, as might be expected from a micro-empirical approach, these accounts are shorn of their normative content, and instead view African states and societies as they are, rather than as western theorists suggest they should be. This illustrates that one of the biggest differences between the neopatrimonial school and the micro-empirical approach is their methodology and the subtlety of argument that this enables them to advance. But their broad overall conclusions about the system's functionings – lack of a public-private distinction in African bureaucracy, widespread corruption – remain common to both approaches. This is the main reason why my analysis throughout this thesis aims at critiquing and reforming the neopatrimonial approach rather than rejecting it outright.

A final critique concerns the conflation of policy with reality. In the Nigerian case, Diamond (1995: 475) suggests that power-sharing may be a useful means to achieve ethnic consensus: "[o]ne of Nigeria's real political achievements since the civil war has been ... the devolution of resources and power (at least in statute, if not in reality) down to the local level". Diamond therefore suggests that because something has been enacted in legislation it must therefore be seen as a positive achievement, regardless of whether it has made any difference to people's lives. I reject this approach and argue that, following Lipsky (1980), it is the way services are provided to citizens that determine how effective a state is. Only by analysing day-to-day interactions at the ground level is this analysis possible.

### ***The neopatrimonial state: historical analysis***

The final aspect of neopatrimonial state theory I will discuss concerns the way in which literature has treated origins of behaviour in contemporary African states. It is this element of the theory that is the site of most differences of opinion, ranging from the retraditionalization thesis of Chabal and Daloz (1999) and Chabal (2002), to Englebert's (2002) view that the exogenous nature of colonial states has led to contemporary empirical weakness. These debates are crucial to my analysis, because they are at the heart of the way in which the African state is assessed. If it is argued that the contemporary state is dysfunctional and it emanates from patterns of politics indigenous to Africa, the logical conclusion is that Africans are incapable of functional governance. Chabal and Daloz (1999: 128), for instance, advance an argument that "African culture," conceptualised in terms of primordial characteristics, is the reason the region has deviated from the "developmental norm". I reject this assertion and argue instead that contemporary African states exhibit a combination of influences from the pre-colonial, colonial and independence eras, and it is the precise way in which these influences have combined that underpin Africa's unique pattern of politics.

Before embarking on an historical analysis of African states, it is important to acknowledge that the experiences of African states vary markedly, both in terms of their internal organisation and their relationships with outsiders, notably the European colonial powers. Literature frequently fails to acknowledge this diversity and resorts to generalisation (see for instance Chabal, 2002; Chabal and Daloz, 1999; Medard, 1982; Callaghy, 1987; Clapham, 1985), Medard (1982: 166) suggesting there is a "traditional African state" and Clapham (1985: 49) a "normal form of social organisation in pre-colonial societies", neither of which are borne out by the evidence. Mustapha (2006: 6), an author who is heavily critical of the neopatrimonial approach, by contrast argues that Africa is "the most culturally diverse continent", while Kelsall (2008: 629) notes that pre-colonial Africa contained a diversity of political formations, ranging from "small bands of hunter-gatherers, to village-based agriculturalists, to more or less militarised chiefdoms and kingdoms, to empires based on production, slave-raiding, and trade". Le Vine (1980: 658) also acknowledges diversity, suggesting that the patriarchal systems that existed in many pre-colonial African societies did not apply to acephalous communities, which he terms "tribes without rulers". One of the most important and largest of these groups is the Igbo, the ethnic group<sup>7</sup> living in the south-eastern part of Nigeria where I carried out my empirical research, and whose pre-colonial norms and values are important to this thesis.

The main cleavage in scholarly considerations of the origins of contemporary African patterns of rule is between those who emphasise the importance of pre-colonial norms

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<sup>7</sup> I have chosen to use the word ethnic group to describe the Igbo and all other groups that I refer to. There were two other possible terms I could have used, tribe and nation. I reject the term tribe for its racist overtones; the term has been used by colonisers in Africa to categorise linguistic groups and "attribute to them differences in culture and way of life" (Nnoli, 1978: 3). In addition, tribe suggests people who are not dissociable from their native territories and the term therefore denies them individuality (Nolutshungu, 1990: 86). The other possible term is nation. This term is used by Achebe (2000) to describe the Igbo because, unlike the term tribe, which Achebe also rejects, nation "is not loaded or derogatory". However, I have chosen not to use it because it could cause confusion with the Nigerian nation and the concept of the nation-state more generally.

– the continuist viewpoint – and those who assert the revolutionary impact of the colonial era – the rupturist viewpoint – though many accounts suggest that it is the precise combination of these two factors that is most important. Some, though not all, authors also acknowledge the numerous changes that have taken place in post-colonial Africa. Authors of the neopatrimonial school tend to emphasise the importance of pre-colonial influences, though there are some who acknowledge the impact of colonial rule. Scholars employing a micro-empirical approach tend to argue for the impact of colonialism or a combination of influences from different eras, thereby emphasising historical syncretism.

### *Continuity*

Arguments stressing continuity assert that the neopatrimonialism and corruption to be found in contemporary African states and societies are simply a continuation of pre-colonial patterns of behaviour in which patrimonial considerations were paramount. The argument is that in pre-colonial systems there was no distinction between public and private and therefore no rule-breaking: “there is no embezzlement because the ruler’s personal income is the same as the government revenue, no nepotism because there is no criterion for appointment to office part from the ruler’s favour” (Clapham, 1985: 50). The continuity argument argues that these patterns still operate in a system that is now governed along rational-legal lines. What had previously been legitimate became illegitimate with the imposition of the colonial legal system.

Perhaps the most widely-known continuist viewpoint is Chabal and Daloz’s theory of re-traditionalization. For these authors (1999: xvii-xviii), analysis of contemporary African states requires “an understanding of the historical continuities – the deep history – which we know to be of importance in our own societies”. The key term here is continuity – the belief that the influences upon contemporary African society are very similar to those of the pre-colonial era. However, Chabal and Daloz mislead the reader by focusing on “our own societies”. They invite us to compare European and African history, conveniently omitting the fact that this history is characterised by the imperialism of the former over the latter and the imposition of a fundamentally different mode of state function than had previously existed. They therefore invite the reader to compare the incomparable.

The retraditionalization argument, which has attracted intense criticism (such as from Murunga, 2006; Mustapha, 2002a), posits that contemporary Africa is “regressing” through such phenomena as the resurgence of ethnicity and “tribal” politics and violence, the growing importance of African religions and witchcraft and “the increasing resort to extreme and, often, ritualized violence in situations of civil disorder” (Chabal and Daloz, 1999: 45). In addition, Chabal and Daloz argue that a number of other phenomena seen in contemporary Africa – “the obligations of mutual support, the imperatives of reciprocity, the importance of gift exchange, the payment of tribute, the need to redistribute, even the habits of cattle rustling or, more generally, plundering others” (1999:100) – all follow on from “norms and practices of the pre-colonial period” (ibid).

This argument can be critiqued for a number of different reasons. First, Chabal and Daloz fail to place their argument into any kind of contemporary context. Smith (2006: 138) argues that practices as diverse as riots over accusations of occult rituals, urban

vigilantism, ethnic nationalism and the increasing popularity of Pentecostal Christianity – which tally very closely with the practices Chabal and Daloz suggest are evidence of retraditionalization – can all be understood as elements of popular discontent about the modern form of corruption known in Nigeria as 419. These practices are therefore expressions of discontent about modernity rather than retraditionalization. This argument also holds true in the case of witchcraft, which has long been associated with social upheaval and modernity rather than tradition and “primitive” thinking (Graveling, 2008: 52). Comaroff and Comaroff (1993) suggest clearly that witchcraft should be viewed in the light of political and social change taking place at the local, national and global level, and that “the historical significance of local ritual practice always requires careful and situated reading” (1993: xxiii). To reduce all ritual practice, even in the context of profound social change, to retraditionalization is absurd.

Second, the retraditionalization argument is culturalist, in that it focuses only on issues related to a supposed African tradition and ignores or omits considerations of other influences such as politics and economics as motivators of behaviour. Culturalism can be defined as “the notion that one’s identity (that is cultural origins, background or attributes) provides the key ‘explanation’ to behaviour” (Chabal and Daloz, 2006: 107) and the “attribution of a common system of values to the members of the same society” (Olivier de Sardan, 2008). Murunga (2006) argues that the retraditionalization paradigm completely ignores the colonial, neo-colonial and neo-liberal influences on contemporary African states. I assess this argument in more detail in the *Culture and the African State* section below.

Third, the concept assumes that pre-colonial systems all operated on the basis of the lack of distinction between public and private outlined by Clapham above. However, evidence suggests that this was not the case. Pre-colonial African political systems were highly diverse (Kelsall, 2008; Mustapha, 2006) and relationships between rulers and ruled varied considerably, as noted above. To presume all pre-colonial polities operated on the basis of rigid hierarchy with ultimate power vested in the ruler is misleading (Mamdani, 1996). A particularly striking example of a society where pre-colonial governance did not operate along these lines is the Igbo, who operated a democratic form of rule (Uchendu, 1965). I discuss the pre-colonial governance within the Igbo ethnic group in more detail in chapter two.

A final criticism of the retraditionalization argument is that it generalises from relatively small-scale societal changes. Murunga (2006) makes this criticism of a different author who advances the retraditionalization thesis, Peter Kagwanja. Murunga criticises Kagwanja for taking the example of Mungiki, a Kenyan politico-religious group and banned criminal organisation, and suggesting that because it draws on pre-colonial idioms of organization based on hierarchical age systems, therefore the entire Kenyan polity must be retraditionalizing. Murunga (2006: 29) refutes this argument as “cheap and utterly unconvincing”. Chabal and Daloz employ a very similar method in seeking to reduce the complexity of contemporary African life to arguments about ethnic violence and witchcraft. While these practices may exist in Africa, and even be increasing, they could not be said to characterise the continent.

Another strong advocate of the view that neopatrimonial rule is heavily influenced by the pre-colonial era is Le Vine (1980). He argues that neopatrimonial regimes are

personalist and contain elements of the traditional patrimonial order that have been translated to the modern political arena, while Bayart (1991) suggests that the roots of contemporary politics in Africa lie in the pre-colonial era. His (1991: 41) theory of the rhizome state rests on the assumption that the important aspect of contemporary state function is “the happenstance roots, their multiple correspondences with the various social formations and in particular in the provinces, the hierarchies of the historical terroirs [home areas, with their roots in the pre-colonial past]”. In particular Bayart focuses on the *longue durée* of the state, its roots in pre-colonial modes and the ways in which African states are products of African history rather than exogenous institutions. Chabal and Daloz (1999) argue similarly that the colonial state was so weak that pre-existing patterns of rule came to the fore soon after independence.

Often the justification for these arguments lies in the supposed similarity between pre- and postcolonial modes of behaviour. Andreski (1979: 282), for instance, comments that the postcolonial practice of requiring even kin to provide financial reward for the offer of a job gives rise to forms of social relations that “somewhat resemble the old custom of giving presents to the heads of clans”, while Ekpo (1979) comments that contemporary corruption is a recrudescence – meaning that it has broken out again after a dormant period – form of the pre-colonial practice of gift-giving. Scholarship of this sort is posited on little more than identification of practices that appear the same as those that existed in the pre-colonial era, but does not take into account the different meanings and functions that these practices have in the fundamentally altered circumstances of contemporary Africa. It is flawed because it is based simply on identification and description, rather than detailed examination of processes of social and cultural change. Olivier de Sardan (2008: 10) notes that this approach lacks rigour: “such assertions are more often than not underpinned by clichés (arising from common sense or scholarly convention), and very rarely from serious empirical research”.

Le Vine’s (1980) central argument is that norms of morality from the pre-colonial era exert continued influence over the actions of postcolonial rulers. Simply, postcolonial leaders should not stray beyond pre-colonial norms of morality or they risk attracting the ire of their communities. Le Vine’s argument about the continuity of patterns of morality was also made forcefully to me during my fieldwork in Nigeria. Dr Christopher Nwangwu, one of my respondents, argued that the way USEN works today reflects community morality in pre-colonial Igboland. Individuals today will not break cultural rules that have existed since the pre-colonial era. Dr Nwangwu is a rare example of an African who argues in favour of a continuist perspective on the state. However, as with other continuist arguments, this assertion is posited on an idea of culture that is primordial and unchanging, and fails to take into account the ways in which the colonial and post-colonial eras have influenced both behaviour and morality.

For continuist arguments to be valid they must make reference to pre-colonial writing or they run the risk of simply retreating into an imagined vision of pre-colonial Africa that lacks historical justification. One difficulty of this is that pre-colonial and colonial-era writings on Africa were written almost exclusively by white westerners, and it has been argued that they are tainted with racism (Rigby, 1996: 3). Nonetheless, they are all we have to assess the modes of governance at the time. Some colonial-era writings give credence to the continuist argument, such as Basden (1982 [1921]: 257), who suggests that in the Igbo-speaking part of Nigeria “theft and other serious offences are

not accounted crime when committed outside the limits of one's own town". Likewise Ottenberg (1967: 35) comments that hostility and aggression to strangers, "especially those living outside the local community", were common, while Isichei (1976: 147) comments that in Nigeria "members of one town tended to look on members of another town as legitimate prey". This suggests that locality was privileged, and that concepts of 'in' and 'out' groups existed, such that the in group was continually favoured and the experiences and views of the out group were inconsequential. This argument is very similar to suggestions in post-colonial literature that the state may be legitimately appropriated (Ekeh, 1975; Okoli, 1980), except in the pre-colonial case the 'out' group is anyone hailing from a different community. Ekeh (2002: 168) also argues in favour of a concept of 'in' and 'out' groups: "[t]he similarity seems to be that both in the socially accepted [pre-colonial] variant and in their latter day aberrant the basic binary of we and they are determined. Those within the group may be spared harm whereas those outside the group may be pillaged without qualms."

The logical argument that could be made, therefore, is this: pre-colonial Igbo people – I concentrate on this ethnic group because all of the above commentaries concern them – conceptualised their lives in terms of 'in' and 'out' groups, which corresponded to one's community<sup>8</sup> – the 'in' group – and other communities – the 'out' group. This belief has transferred to the modern era, where the 'in' group remains one's community, but the 'out' group has altered and is now embodied by the state. It could therefore be argued that patterns of behaviour such as taking from the state to benefit one's community, nepotism and corruption, all aspects of the contemporary neopatrimonial state, have clear pre-colonial origins.

Understanding the role of concepts such as 'in' and 'out' groups in contemporary Nigerian society and their linkages to pre-colonial norms is undoubtedly difficult. To suggest that the modern phenomenon of appropriating the state (to use Ekeh's terminology, the "civic public") to enhance the community (the "primordial public") is simply a modern version of hostility to 'out' groups is a large conceptual leap. However, the strength of kinship in Nigeria remains strong and, when examined alongside numerous other factors, the notion that state appropriation is, in part, an expression of hostility to an 'out' group or the privileging of one's home community over outsiders has some veracity. It is, however, important to recognise that, while pre-colonial norms may exert an influence, their form and function are likely to have changed dramatically as a result of colonialism and independence (Olivier de Sardan, 1999, 2008). What this suggests is the syncretic origin of contemporary practice.

### *Rupture*

The opposite argument to that of the continuists is rupture, which refutes the argument for continuity taken by many neopatrimonial state scholars. This argument suggests that the colonial era exerted such influence on states and societies in Africa that contemporary governance on the continent bears little resemblance to that of the pre-colonial period. Ekeh's (1975: 193) position is unequivocal: "[i]t is to the colonial experience that any valid conceptualization of the unique nature of African politics must look". Englebert (1997: 768) provides a similarly robust critique of those who seek to

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<sup>8</sup> In the Igbo part of Nigeria the term community refers to "a group of related villages whose members had a charter of mythical descent from the same founding father" (Afigbo, 2005).



diminish the role of colonialism, arguing that African state failure “derive[s] from the very exogeneity of the state, its lack of embeddedness, its divorce from underlying norms and networks of social organisation”. For Olivier de Sardan (2009), the colonial introduction of a system of “administrative chieftaincy” is at the root of contemporary neopatrimonial governance while Ekeh (1975) argues that colonialism alienated Africans from the state, which gave rise to a realm that was, and is, amoral – the “civic public”.

There are a number of aspects of contemporary state function that different authors attribute to the colonial experience. Njoku (2005) suggests clearly that colonialism is at the root of corruption in south-eastern Nigeria because of the structure of public administration it introduced. This took place through the imposition of local warrant chiefs – local versions of administrative chieftaincies, so termed because they were chiefs created by the warrant of the colonial authorities – who were foisted upon communities and therefore felt no responsibility to them. Njoku argues that this engendered a system, which still exists today, in which access to government posts was seen as an opportunity for advancing self-interest rather than the interests of the community. Blundo and Olivier de Sardan (2006: 37) similarly cite several studies suggesting that the experience of colonialism “engenders a particular perception of the public sphere and crystallises a series of behaviours and power relations which re-create fertile ground for widespread corruption in the modern sense of the term”. Williams (1980) argues that colonisation “transformed significant social relationships into commodity relationships ... so that people’s life chances are determined by their access to and exclusion from resources introduced by the colonial political economy”, while Allen (1995) comments that it was the process of decolonisation itself which made access to political office the focus of the population’s material expectations. These arguments all suggest a fundamental transformation in the ways African societies worked that has given rise to some of the characteristics of the contemporary neopatrimonial state.

The notion of the state as transplanted and therefore alien to African societies has been discussed by a number of authors. These authors assert that the different values of imported and indigenous modes of operation are the crux of contemporary problems in the African state and that the exogeneity of the imported colonial state gave rise to a perception of illegitimacy in the minds of the people it ruled. Rulers were often not those with traditional authority, but rather those appointed by the colonial masters (Englebert, 1997; Njoku, 2005). Ordinary Africans came to view the state as something divorced from their values, and appropriating the state for private ends became viewed as legitimate. Bureaucracy came to be seen as “the white man’s institution” and for this reason anyone who could successfully defraud the state was a hero (Okoli, 1980: 12). For Achebe (1960: 30) the state was “an alien institution and people’s business was to get as much from it as they could without getting caught”, while Leys, writing in 1965, suggested that “[t]o many people the ‘state’ and its organs were identified with alien rule and were proper objects of plunder” (1965: 224). He suggested that state institutions “have not yet been re-identified fully as instruments for the promotion of common interests” (ibid). The fact that in south-eastern Nigeria in 2007 many people still termed state employment *ọrụ-bekee* or *ọrụ-oyigbo*, meaning white man’s work, suggests perceptions of illegitimacy remain.

Szeftel (1998: 235), however, does not agree with the notion “that the modern state is somehow alien ... that notions of the separation of public duty and private interest lie somewhere outside the cognition of African politicians and administrators”. I would argue that notions of separation of public and private are entirely within the cognition of African politicians and bureaucrats, but the generalised practice of corruption and the pressures placed upon them by kin and community make corrupt practice both an economically and socially rational response to circumstances. Both literature, cited above, and my own observations during fieldwork, reveal that, in Nigeria at least, those working for the state understand the functions that the state is supposed to fulfil and the notion of public interest, but that the pressures they respond to are more likely to be those from elsewhere, notably kin and community. Put simply, corruption tends to benefit those taking part in it and, if the fruits of the action are shared amongst the participant’s client group, no social sanction arises. The fact that individuals perceive that the state is legitimate to appropriate for themselves indicates their alienation from it.

Bayart (1991), however, rejects the assertion that colonised people viewed the state as alien and illegitimate, arguing instead that the colonial state was “appropriated by the peoples subject to it”. He advances a continuist argument that views the state not an imported artefact “tacked on to social and cultural realities to which it is totally alien” (1991: 40) but suggests that it was adopted by indigenous social actors, therefore illustrating its “rootedness in local societies”. However, as Njoku (2005) makes clear, at least in the case of the Igbo, some indigenous actors did take control of the state, but they were imposed by the colonialists and lacked legitimacy in their own communities. Olivier de Sardan (2009: 63) argues that a real process of appropriation did take place, because the new African bureaucratic class retained the “scornful or arrogant superiority” towards service users and the formal and informal advantages associated with a position that had been the hallmark of the colonisers. In addition Englebert (1997) criticises Bayart for his lack of appreciation of the process of state formation, arguing that because African states were formed out of imported institutions, they suffer from contemporary weakness. He further argues that the African hegemonic class has been able to use contemporary state forms for its benefit, resulting in assimilation of elites through neopatrimonial means at the expense of formal statehood. The weakness of contemporary African states and their neopatrimonial character are therefore ascribed to the process of postcolonial state formation. I find Englebert’s analysis much more convincing than Bayart’s as it acknowledges the fundamental rupture of the colonial period and the impact of the process of decolonisation on contemporary African state forms. In particular, Bayart appears – as many other neopatrimonialists do – to conflate elites with the state. According to Bayart, because elites appropriated the post-colonial state, the colonial era therefore had no impact. But it was precisely this process that has given rise to states that are viewed as illegitimate by their people, which is at the root of contemporary neopatrimonialism.

Olivier de Sardan’s (2009) work on Francophone West Africa focuses on the colonial impact on bureaucracy. He argues that, rather than importing the same type of bureaucracy as existed at home, the French instead implemented a system in which the gap between administrators and administered was much greater than in France. This large gap and some of the features it engendered – despotism, “privilegism” and

the role of intermediaries – explain some of the behaviours found in contemporary Francophone African bureaucracy (Olivier de Sardan, 2009: 60). Olivier de Sardan focuses on the path dependent nature of bureaucracy, arguing that the despotic aspect introduced in the colonial era remains today: “*whereas in Europe modern bureaucracy developed more or less in parallel to the emergence of citizenship and democracy throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, in contrast, in Africa it has gone hand in hand with inequality, violence and contempt, in the absence of any real civic or egalitarian tradition, even since independence*” (Olivier de Sardan, 2009: 61, original emphasis). The scorn for service users and disproportionate extension of advantages associated with a position, which Olivier de Sardan argues are key characteristics of contemporary African bureaucracies, therefore have roots in the colonial period. He goes on to suggest that in fact African bureaucracy is the result of a double rupture, in which pre-colonial modes of power were replaced with those introduced by the colonialists, while a bureaucratic rupture introduced the dichotomy between public and private and use of written procedures that had not previously existed in Africa.

There is much literature examining the impact of colonialism on ethnicity, which is held to be an integral aspect of neopatrimonialism (Medard, 1982). Its relevance to neopatrimonial thought is through such actions as state actors privileging members of their own ethnic group when making decisions on, for instance, access to public sector jobs and contracts. It is argued that colonialism fundamentally altered ethnic relations and, particularly, engendered ethnic conflicts that had either not existed or had lain dormant in the pre-colonial era (Mustapha, 2002a). Mamdani (1996: 286) argues that during the colonial period ethnic identity was “politically enforced”, while in Rwanda “[w]hatever Hutu and Tutsi identity may have stood for in the pre-colonial state no longer mattered; the Belgians had made ‘ethnicity’ the defining feature of Rwandan existence” (Gourevitch, 1998: 57). Mamdani (2009) further suggests that the British colonialists wanted to “defend African tradition”, but that they would also decide what African tradition meant, and for them it meant ethnicity. In fact, pre-colonial Africans “moved in and out of multiple identities” of which ethnicity was just one (Ranger, 1983: 248). Mustapha (2002a) notes the way in which the Chamba ethnic group in Nigeria effectively ‘became’ Jukun, a different ethnic group, because this group were privileged by the British colonisers, then went back to being Chamba when political competition engendered by independence made it expedient to do so.

What these examples illustrate is the way in which ethnic identification changed dramatically during the colonial period. This was a response to two distinct factors: first, the emphasis the colonialists placed on ethnicity as the primary building block of African society (Coleman, 1965; Mamdani, 2009); and second, that access to resources became predicated on ethnic identity due to the tendency for colonisers to privilege those groups who had similar systems of governance to their own (Mustapha, 2000). The alterations of ethnic identity that took place during colonialism clearly illustrate that ethnicity in Africa may be a rational response to circumstances rather than a primordial and unchanging force: to use Sandbrook’s (1972: 104) words, “solidarity on the basis of cultural-linguistic affinity becomes salient in a situation of competition over the distribution of wealth, power, and jobs in poor countries composed of disparate peoples”. These arguments refute the idea of the retraditionalization of African polities because, if ethnicity was, to a large degree, ‘created’ as a result of

colonialism, how can ethnic violence signify retraditionalization? It is also important to note, however, that a number of neopatrimonialist scholars (including Chabal and Daloz, 1999; Bayart, 2009; Medard, 1982) acknowledge the ‘invented’ character of African ethnicity. Chabal and Daloz (1999: 57) argue that colonialism had a fundamental impact on “configuration and reconfiguration” of ethnic identities while still arguing for their retraditionalization thesis. It is difficult to see how they reconcile these two seemingly contradictory arguments.

### *Continuity and rupture*

A number of scholars assert that the modes of operation of contemporary African states are neither simple continuities of pre-colonial patterns of association nor are they entirely new forms arising from colonialism. Instead, they are the product of the adaptation of African communities to the new circumstances in which they live, alongside adaptation of these circumstances to norms of behaviour in contemporary Africa. This process is iterative and ongoing. A large number of scholars – both from the neopatrimonial school and elsewhere – acknowledge the influence of all three eras – pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial – on contemporary African life. Kohli is a neopatrimonial scholar who does this. Unlike a number of authors on the neopatrimonial state, he is forceful in his assertion that the legacy of colonialism has had a fundamental impact on postcolonial African states and societies. He suggests that rather than creating “effective modern states”, colonial rulers chose to “rule by accommodating various ‘premodern,’ personalistic, indigenous elites” (2004: 395). However, Kohli does not argue, as, for instance, Ekeh (1975) does, that colonialism is the only source of neopatrimonialism. Instead he suggests that indigenous elites destroyed what existed of the colonial state but failed to build anything in its place, instead reducing politics to “a vehicle for personal and sectional aggrandizement” (2004: 396). Kohli’s argument combining internal and external influences is a persuasive one.

Olivier de Sardan (1999) argues forcefully for the syncretic nature of the logics that help perpetuate contemporary corruption. He suggests that there are some elements of pre-colonial African cultures – such as brokerage, ostentation and gift-giving – that are combined and amalgamated with practices from colonial and post-colonial eras and give rise to contemporary forms. Likewise Leys (1965: 225) argues that while contemporary bribery has its roots in pre-colonial gift-giving practice, its significance has changed, and the nature of the infringement of a rule is concealed by its continuity with an earlier practice. Blundo and Olivier de Sardan (2006: 29) comment that contemporary African states are undoubtedly the product of myriad influences, and that those who take rigid positions of continuity or rupture suffer from an “absence of historical memory”. Olivier de Sardan (1999) constructs a robust defence of this position. He first argues that to put corruption down to ‘African culture’ is indefensible:

Should one therefore impute corruption in Africa to some kind of ‘African culture’? Nothing would be more absurd. The notion of culture is extremely polysemic, and many of its interpretations are, to my mind, unacceptable. Nowhere is there any Value System, soaring above the populations and inducing their deportment, be it on an ‘ethnic’, national or ‘African’ level (1999: 44).

The opposite argument, taken to its extreme, is given similarly short shrift:

On the other hand, the converse, denial of the existence of common normative pressures exerted on actors, or a refusal to take into account shared social codes which act as a foundation for modes of social recognition or modes of intelligibility of interrelations, would imply falling into the opposite excess (ibid).

Olivier de Sardan suggests that the solution to this dichotomy is to conceptualise motivations for individual behaviour in terms of “logics”, which he suggests are “normative configurations which influence actors’ strategies” (ibid). He uses the term logics to avoid the potential misinterpretation that use of the term culture engenders. Both my review of literature and my empirical research suggest that Olivier de Sardan’s argument, which emphasises the syncretic origins of corruption and contemporary actors’ motivations, is strong, for three important reasons. First, because culture, conceptualised in terms of shared understandings, is an influence on behaviour, though clearly not the only one. Second, because culture is viewed as an ongoing process, one that is influenced by pre-colonial practice but not defined by it. Third, Olivier de Sardan notes the way in which the “logics” he enumerates do not automatically give rise to corrupt practice, therefore highlighting the heterogeneity of practice. The neopatrimonial approach, with its focus on abstract understandings of complex phenomena, fails to achieve this understanding.

#### *Culture and the African state*

Some neopatrimonial state scholars suggest a prominent role for culture as an influence on contemporary African politics. Often culture is viewed by these authors as an aspect of pre-colonial African societies and can therefore be viewed as part of the continuity thesis. A number (such as Kohli, 2004; Bratton and van de Walle, 1997; Englebert, 2002) do not address the issue of culture as a variable and focus more on the operation of the neopatrimonial state than the influences upon its action. Overall, however, culture forms a significant part of the neopatrimonial state thesis.

The two authors of the neopatrimonial school who focus most on culture and provide the most robust defence of their viewpoint are Chabal and Daloz (1999, 2006). There is some debate as to whether these two authors could be described as culturalist, in that they privilege culture as the most important influence on individual and collective action. The authors themselves deny this accusation (2006: 106-107), while a number of others assert its veracity (Olivier de Sardan, 2009; Murunga, 2006). There are a number of reasons to suggest that Chabal and Daloz *are* culturalist. First, they argue that culture is “one of the key fundamentals of social life, the matrix within which that which we understand as political action takes place” (2006: 21). In *Africa Works* (1999), these two authors go considerably further. However, rather than advancing their own culturalist arguments, they instead reference African scholars who they quote appreciatively. This passage summarises the weight Chabal and Daloz attach to culture and their belief in the uniqueness of African politics:

What is noteworthy is the importance given by these African authors to cultural features as determinants of development. They focus attention upon the need for an analysis based on the study of mentalities. Another Cameroonian asks, with a pleasantly mischievous sense of humour, whether Africa does not in reality need ‘a cultural adjustment programme’. For this author, the fundamental reason why the continent south of the Sahara has ‘deviated’ from the common developmental norm is ‘African culture’, the common core of which includes: apathy, a large dose of fatalism,

a peculiar relation to the notion of time, the insignificance of the individual in the face of the community, a tendency to 'convivial' excesses, the primacy of conflict avoidance and the weight of the 'irrational' (1999: 128).

The overall viewpoint of these authors is clear from this passage: they believe that the nature of contemporary African politics and society more generally is largely governed by cultural factors, which are viewed as primordial and timeless. This viewpoint – though perhaps not expressed in such strident terms – is shared by other neopatrimonialist scholars. Chabal (2002: 459) argues that neopatrimonialism is “deeply embedded in the African sociocultural matrix”, while for Medard (1982: 175) corruption is the result of Africans responding to “cultural” as opposed to “legal” norms. Le Vine (1980) argues that several aspects of “African political culture” – which he implicitly suggests is pre-colonial – give rise to contemporary neopatrimonialism. “It could hardly be otherwise”, he suggests, “given the fact that no African state has wholly, or even largely, transcended its traditional politics and managed to fashion a completely new national political amalgam, be it ‘revolutionary’, ‘Marxist’, or something else” (Le Vine, 1980: 666). In a later piece of work, the same author (1993: 274) goes on to argue for the presence of “a culture of political corruption” in Africa.

However, these formulations are not unique to neopatrimonial authors. Those adopting a micro-empirical approach also contribute to debates around culture and the African state. Olivier de Sardan (1999: 26) argues that there is a “cultural embeddedness” of corruption in Africa and highlights five “logics” that are engrained in contemporary African social life and contribute to the “corruption complex”: negotiation, gift-giving, the solidarity network, predatory authority and redistributive accumulation. Similarly Smith (2006: 6) argues that Nigeria has a “culture of corruption”, though he also suggests that, as Nigerians are both participants in and critics of corruption in their own country, Nigeria could be seen simultaneously as a “culture against corruption”. This illustrates both the paradoxical nature of corruption in Nigeria and the ambivalence of Nigerians about the phenomenon.

A further difference between Chabal and Daloz, in particular, and the micro-empirical authors I have cited is that culture is highlighted as a key variable in discussions of corruption in Africa, but it is far from the only one. Olivier de Sardan (2009) notes that petty and everyday corruption in Francophone African bureaucracies emerged during the colonial period and notes a number of post-colonial changes such as the economic and political favours of the Cold War period and the impact of structural adjustment that have underpinned the growth of corruption. Smith, in his discussions of the Nigerian context, places the Nigerian culture of corruption – which, he argues, is the creation of numerous different influences and does not hark back to some timeless idea of African corruption – in the context of various social pressures. In particular Smith notes Nigeria's petroleum-dominated economy and the poverty and inequality that characterise Nigeria as factors contributing to the prevalence of corruption. A number of other authors have argued that culture has an influence on society but that it is just one of many. Some of these authors (such as Mustapha, 2006; Murunga, 2006) argue that an excessive reliance on culture in seeking to understand African societies is part of a pathologising discourse that considers African society to be abnormal. One of the most dangerous aspects of culturalist writings, Mustapha (2006) argues, is that they attempt to justify recolonisation of Africa, because they argue that African states only

exist to provide leaders with “a fig leaf for credibility in the international system” (2006: 6) and do not deserve to be called states at all. This argument gains credibility when compared to analyses such as Ellis’s (2005) call for “international trusteeships” over African failed states and Jackson and Rosberg’s (1982) suggestion that African states are juridical but not empirical.

In place of the emphasis on culture, scholars such as Mustapha argue that the economy is the key factor to analyse. Ergas (1986: 306), a neopatrimonialist scholar, also comments that an important motivation for petty corruption is “grossly inadequate salaries” and “endemic scarcities of basic commodities”, while Khan (2006, cited in Mustapha, 2006: 7) suggests that the existence of such practices as patron-clientism and “extra-economic means for appropriating resources” are “intimately connected to the underdevelopment of economies [and] the limited scope of viable capitalist economics in developing countries”. Leys (1965: 225-226) suggests a number of reasons underlying the prevalence of corruption in newly independent states that combine cultural and economic factors. He cites weak national interest, the prevalence of poverty and inequality and the ease with which corruption can be covered up as factors heightening its prevalence. The view of Clapham (1982) is that clientelism, a key facet of neopatrimonial states, is rational behaviour that is not a characteristic of particular cultures.

Authors adopting a micro-empirical approach tend to link their discussions of culture to an examination of its variable roots and changeable character in order to prevent accusations of ethnocentrism. Olivier de Sardan (1999: 26) argues that there is a moral economy of corruption in Africa, but asserts that it is “‘post-colonial’ and fundamentally syncretic. It in no way reflects on ‘traditional’ or pre-colonial culture, even though ancient cultural elements, transformed and recombined, are undeniably amalgamated with numerous elements inherited from the colonial period, as well as others produced during the independence era.” This argument is very close to the one I make later in this thesis about the origins of patterns of behaviour in contemporary Nigeria: culture is invoked, but it is clearly asserted that culture emanates not from some ‘timeless’ Africa but through processes of social change in the pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial periods. Blundo and Olivier de Sardan (2006) also state unequivocally that they are not culturalist – though they, and Olivier de Sardan (1999), have been accused of it (Dahou, 2002; Mustapha, 2006) – and argue that “vague general notions based on ‘cultural registers’ and native ‘idioms’ divorced from empirical data” are the hallmarks of a culturalist approach. The rich empirical data Blundo and Olivier de Sardan draw on, and their appreciation of the myriad influences that make up contemporary Africa, provide a robust defence against accusations of culturalism.

I argue that culture has a part to play in explanations of contemporary African politics and society. However, two salient factors must be borne in mind. First, consideration must also be given to a multitude of other factors including economic deprivation and inequality. Second, the factors that give rise to a ‘moral economy’ of corruption are syncretic, in that they are the product of diverse influences. This moral economy is in no way a simple replica of pre-colonial norms.

## **Conclusion**

The foregoing analysis suggests that there is scope to refound the theory of neopatrimonialism in a way that simultaneously retains some of its conclusions and casts aside other aspects that make the theory abstract, decontextualised and normative. My research, incorporating both primary data and analysis of literature, suggests that, within African interface bureaucracies, personal relationships and private financial considerations are important. This broad assertion is the basis of the neopatrimonial approach to African states, and my research therefore argues that the approach has some merit. In addition, some authors who argue for the existence of an African neopatrimonial state also highlight elements that, my analysis suggests, have merit, such as Englebert's (2002) contention that the neopatrimonial state in Africa derives from the exogeneity of the state and Bratton and van de Walle's (1997) argument in favour of a state that is a hybrid rather than a façade.

However, numerous elements of the approach are flawed and require analysis that is more empirically grounded and historically accurate. There is, therefore, space for a new type of theory, which analyses the ways in which 'ordinary' Africans get on in their public sectors but assesses them from the point of view of the actors concerned; does not view the state as undifferentiated and accepts that there are differences in the functioning of separate arenas; acknowledges corruption and patronage but understands that the official rules retain some power; assesses the African state as an entity in itself rather than an inferior version of western models; and acknowledges the tremendous debt of the period of colonialism and postcolonial state formation on contemporary state function. A theory such as this could provide a much more lucid and valuable account of contemporary Africa than the approaches that currently dominate academic discourse.

In the following chapters I outline the benefits and deficiencies of the neopatrimonial state paradigm in the Nigerian case and link this directly to my empirical findings from an elite Nigerian university.



## **Chapter 2: Nigerian state, society and politics**

### **Introduction**

This chapter places the discussions of the previous chapter into the Nigerian context. It has two goals. The first is to analyse contemporary Nigerian state and society using works from two approaches, those of the neopatrimonial school and those utilising a micro-empirical approach that uses tools from the discipline of socio-anthropology. In particular I use the latter to critique the former. Both of these approaches offer important analyses of the character of the contemporary Nigerian state. My second goal is to assess the historical antecedents of contemporary state forms in Nigeria. As noted in chapter one, much neopatrimonial state scholarship suggests that African states – including Nigeria's – are going through a process of retraditionalization. I aim to analyse the influences of the pre-colonial, colonial and independence periods in Nigeria in order to assess the validity of this argument.

Nigeria has been the subject of a number of analyses of its state and society and the relationship between the two. As with broader literature on the African state, these discussions emanate from a number of different perspectives, ranging from analyses focused on the abstract essence of the state and the actions of elites at one extreme (such as Chabal and Daloz, 2006; Joseph, 1987; Kohli, 2004; Bayart et al, 1999; Diamond, 1995; Lewis, 1996), to micro-empirical accounts focusing on the state as it is experienced by its citizens at the other. One author, Daniel Jordan Smith (2001, 2003, 2005, 2006), has made a particularly large contribution to this field of knowledge in the Nigerian and specifically Igbo context and his work has had a great impact on my understanding of Nigerian state and society. Smith's work, like my own, focuses particularly on the relationships between two sets of norms in Nigerian society: those that emanate from the 'official' rules and are grounded in public policy and those unofficial norms that originate in wider society. He seeks, as I do, to examine how the 'everyday state' in Nigeria actually works, how individuals navigate their way through Nigeria's notoriously corrupt and complicated public sector and how these processes are experienced by Nigeria's citizens.

### **Contemporary Nigerian state and society**

#### ***The neopatrimonial approach***

As noted in detail in chapter one, the neopatrimonial approach to African states and societies tends to examine systems as opposed to actors, to focus its gaze at the highest level of politics and to employ a normative perspective when examining state function. A number of authors have examined the Nigerian state and political system using this broad approach, though, as with neopatrimonial analysis of African states more generally, these authors have differences of opinion on some key issues. A key similarity, however, is the propensity towards labelling the Nigerian state: neopatrimonial (Kohli, 2004); prebendal (Joseph, 1987); felonious (Bayart et al, 1999); predatory (Lewis, 1996); the "State that does not make sense" (Chabal and Daloz, 2006); and the "uncivic society" (Diamond, 1995). Before I analyse their contributions, one important point needs to be made: these analyses of contemporary Nigerian state and society are very similar to those made from the neopatrimonial approach about Africa more generally. Rather than Nigeria being seen as unique, therefore, it is rather viewed as an archetypal neopatrimonial state (Kohli, 2004).

Kohli's analysis of the Nigerian neopatrimonial state is placed in a developmental framework, in that it examines the characteristics of contemporary Nigerian governance and outlines the reasons that these characteristics have prevented sustained economic and social development. He argues that there are four characteristics of a "pure" neopatrimonial state: absence of competent bureaucrats; "nearly routinized" corruption at the highest levels; "serious political disconnect" between state and citizens; and absence of "normative glue" to bind rulers and followers in a national project (2004: 393-394). He suggests that no pure neopatrimonial state exists, but that Nigeria comes very close as it exhibits all of these characteristics. He goes on to term the Nigerian state a façade masking "a personalistic and ethnically fragmented political elite and a bureaucracy and army that not only shared these traits but were also not very competent and professional" (2004: 394).

Kohli concentrates on those factors that have influenced development at the macro level and focuses particularly on Nigeria's political leadership. He suggests that had Nigeria had "another Nehru, introducing the necessary political unity and public-spiritedness [it] would have enabled Nigeria to graduate from dysfunctional neopatrimonialism to a functioning, fragmented-multiclass state". While it is true that Nigeria had, in the words of Mustapha (2002a: 170), "no Nkrumahs, no Nenyattas, and no Mandelas", and instead had one iconic figure for each of Nigeria's three regions – Sir Ahmadu Bello in the north, Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe in the east and Chief Obafemi Awolowo in the west – I would still cast doubt over whether individual leadership could have radically altered Nigeria's development path. This is for a number of reasons. First, as noted later in this chapter, the corruption and alienation of individuals from the state that characterise Nigeria have their roots in the colonial experience and in the forms of rule that existed at local levels. Second, Achebe's (1983) argument that bad leadership lies at the root of Nigeria's lack of development suggests that only leaders have the opportunity to enrich themselves through corruption:

[T]he concept of "the average Nigerian" ... is hardly helpful. If indeed there is such a creature as "an average Nigerian" he is likely to be found at a point in social space with limited opportunities for corruption as we generally understand the word. Corruption goes with power; and whatever the average man may have it is *not* power. Therefore to hold any useful discussion of corruption, we must first locate it where it properly belongs – in the ranks of the powerful (1983: 48-49, original emphasis).

It is, of course, correct to assert that Nigeria's leaders have been and are corrupt and have used the state for their own ends. But to deny that corruption goes on elsewhere in the Nigerian polity is to ignore the facts. As Smith (2006: 55) suggests, "[t]he same person who rails against General Abacha or President Obasanjo can, in a different moment, lament or laugh about their own involvement in corruption". Last, political leaders do not have complete freedom to operate, in Nigeria as elsewhere. Mustapha (2002b) suggests that "wider and more important popular processes" limit the options that political leaders have to operate with impunity. Despite these considerations, the 'bad leaders' argument is strong in literature (Achebe, 1983; Maier, 2000; Diamond, 1995; Smith, 2006), among my respondents and in Nigerian society more generally.

Kohli's characterisation of Nigerian state and society has much to recommend it – it is detailed, historically accurate and does not seek to blame Nigeria for its predicament,

instead focusing on the failures of colonial rule. However, his arguments are also strongly normative and use the Weberian rational-legal state as their starting point. They also appear to have no empirical basis whatsoever, relying entirely on analysis of documentary sources. Analyses of the type forwarded by Kohli can tell us something about Nigerian development and society but the lack of empirical understanding means that he risks providing analysis that is overly focused on the highest levels of politics and their impact on society, devoid of understanding of broader societal changes.

Joseph's (1987) *Democracy and prebendal politics in Nigeria* examines the Nigerian polity in detail. His characterisation of the Nigerian political system is based on the concept of prebendalism, which refers to "patterns of political behaviour which rest on the justifying principle that [political] offices should be competed for and then utilized for the personal benefit of office holders as well as of their reference or support group" (1987: 8), though there is an implication that his analysis refers to bureaucracy as well as politics. Joseph's analysis links the concepts of ethnicity, clientelism and social class. Patron-client relations, he argues, provide a sustaining framework for prebendal politics, while what sustains clientelism is insecurity: individuals wish to associate themselves with 'big men' who will provide support when the state cannot or does not. This argument is similar to that advanced by Chabal and Daloz (2006) and Smith (2003). The crossover between Smith's work and that of neopatrimonial scholars – both those working on Nigeria and other African states – illustrates the similarities between the conclusions drawn by the two approaches, which I remarked upon in chapter one.

My critique of Joseph's approach is similar to a number of authors who employ comparable approaches. His core concept – prebendalism – has a degree of analytical usefulness and certainly operates among large numbers of staff at USEN. For those academic staff I describe as 'unserious' or 'traders', prebendalism succinctly summarises their position: they seek employment in the state sector because it provides opportunities for enrichment; they use these opportunities to assist themselves and their client group. However, though they may be a large and, some would argue, growing proportion of academic staff at USEN (Anugwom, 2002), traders are by no means the only type of staff. While many of those working within the Nigerian state do perform their functions more readily for kin (or *parent, ami ou connaissance* (parent, friend or acquaintance) for Olivier de Sardan (2009: 48, original emphasis) in Francophone West Africa), they also provide services for others, albeit more slowly and often not without payment. In addition, there are "islands of functionality" (Olivier de Sardan, 2009) in Nigerian bureaucracies, including the higher education system: people who see their main goal as doing a good job for their students. The prebendal pattern therefore operates among some people but it cannot be said to define Nigerian public life, which is considerably more complex than this. This reductionism is a hallmark of the neopatrimonial approach.

However, Joseph is correct to assert that the state is the primary means through which Nigerians seek wealth. Among the group of lecturers referred to as traders – some of whom began their working lives as traders and some who continue this occupation part-time – it is notable that they have decided to pursue a course of action that takes them out of the commercial sector and into the university. Given that the main goal of these members of staff is financial gain, this is a powerful indicator of the lucrative

nature of contemporary Nigerian higher education for those who choose to use it to enrich themselves.

Lewis (1996) focuses on the evolution of Nigeria's political economy from prebendalism, which he terms decentralised patrimonial rule, to predation, or avaricious dictatorship (1996: 80). He focuses particularly on the presidency of Ibrahim Babangida (1985-1993) and argues that it was during his tenure that corruption in Nigeria became much larger in scale and import. As with many accounts of the neopatrimonial type, Lewis focuses his gaze at the highest levels of politics, thus equating the state with political elites (Bierschenk, 2008), and he provides little analysis of the impact of high-level change on the lives of ordinary Nigerians. Though the periods of dictatorship overseen by Babangida and Abacha (1993-1998) undoubtedly had a significant impact on provision of Nigerian public services – the arena where the individual meets the state – accounts such as Lewis's do not assess it. The role of predation on ordinary Nigerians is therefore ignored or its impact treated superficially.

Diamond (1995) combines criticisms of Nigeria's leaders with a more general critique of Nigerian politics and society, which he terms "the uncivic society" because it is "marked by the absence of the reciprocal, cooperative, cross-cutting ties that breed the most crucial foundation of democracy – trust, and with it the commitment to the larger political community" (1995: 473-474). Diamond sees all those characteristics that one might view as aspects of a neopatrimonial state – "corruption, exploitation, economic recklessness, and abuse of power" as deriving directly from this uncivicness, which has parallels in Myrdal's (1970) thesis of the "soft state". As Diamond acknowledges, however, the kind of "civicness" he lauds is still to be found in "the ethnic village or community" (1995: 474), which again highlights the exogeneity of the imposed colonial state as the root of many of Nigeria's problems.

Chabal and Daloz's (2006) approach to Nigerian state and society is succinctly summed up by their newest label, following *Africa Works*' (1999) "the political instrumentalisation of disorder": "the State that does not make sense". Their analysis of Nigerian state and society is notable for a number of reasons. The first is the justification provided for, one presumes, earlier work of theirs (notably *Africa Works*) that received significant criticism. They strongly criticise the term neopatrimonial to describe African states despite the fact that just one year earlier (2005), Chabal argued for this approach. Second, they argue that they favour an approach that does not compare Africa to the developed world just one page after bemoaning the influence of clientelism and factionalism which, they argue, are "not congenial to the putative Westernisation of the political system" (Chabal and Daloz, 2006: 262). These apparent efforts to distance themselves from their earlier work are not convincing because their overall approach has changed little. The third point to note is their characterisation of contemporary Nigeria. Chabal and Daloz (2006: 262) emphasise the reliance of ordinary Nigerians on patrons or communitarian solidarity for security in an environment where state officials seek to maximise their own gains. They also suggest that Nigerians accept this system resignedly as they know that they can do little to change it. Last, they again note (2006: 267) the fact that the state is a façade, "the formal regulations of which are used when necessary and discarded when expedient". Once again, as noted in detail in chapter one, there is considerable overlap between this approach – which, despite their protestation, I will term the neopatrimonial

approach – and those provided by anthropologists, notably, in the case of Nigeria, Smith.

Some of Chabal and Daloz's assertions carry a good deal of weight, as both my analysis of literature and data collected during fieldwork illustrate. The reliance of Nigerians on alternative means of social support and widespread acceptance of a system many see as unfair are clear characteristics of the Nigerian polity. But there are also problems with their analysis. First, the state cannot be viewed as a façade: the Nigerian state is not wholly privatised, and it performs useful functions, though not particularly efficiently. Second, despite their arguments to the contrary, Chabal and Daloz approach Nigeria using a heavily normative lens. They outline the characteristics of an ideal-type bureaucracy and then assert that the Nigerian state does not meet these characteristics. This approach remains the same as that taken in *Africa Works* towards African states more generally and can be criticised for a number of reasons, which I outlined in detail in chapter one.

The most extreme contribution to the study of the Nigerian state from a neopatrimonial perspective comes from Bayart et al (1999), who argue that significant numbers of Nigeria's political elite are involved in international drug smuggling, supporting mainly Igbo smuggling gangs. They go on to argue that the drugs gangs have relative autonomy and "the main factions which participate in the government of the country simply levy an unofficial tax or tithe on drugs which transit via Nigeria" (Bayart et al, 1999: 29). The conclusion they draw is that Nigeria is a felonious state. The biggest problem with Bayart et al's analysis is that it relies on sources that Bayart (1999: 10) acknowledges should be "regarded with caution, as US drug enforcement agencies occasionally modify the data which they publish, for operational or political reasons". It also characterises the entire state based on the actions of just a few of its members.

There are significantly fewer examinations of Nigeria from the neopatrimonial perspective than those examining African states more generally. This is largely because the approach tends to presume that all African states have the same characteristics and seeks to generalise across the continent. The approaches that I have analysed are very different from one another, which is why I have chosen to analyse them individually as opposed to critiquing their general approach. But some characteristics are common to all. First, there is a lack of empirical evidence to support the conclusions drawn, with the exception of Joseph. These analyses could therefore be regarded as "essayism" (Olivier de Sardan, 2009: 39) and do not reflect the realities of life for most Nigerians. Second, they tend to be normative, a criticism of the neopatrimonial approach that I covered in detail in chapter one. Third, they fail to address the fact that political systems are made up of actors: the motivations and pressures placed on those who form a neopatrimonial or prebendal system require consideration, which these analyses fail to address. And last, they characterise the state as entirely privatised and its functioning a mere façade, which both my empirical data and the work of others suggests is untrue.

### ***Micro-empirical approaches***

Contemporary micro-empirical approaches to the study of the Nigerian state are rare and are dominated by Daniel Jordan Smith, though there are a few other examples (see for instance Apter, 2005; Ekeh, 2002; Olukoj, 2004). In part the dominance of

one author from this discipline reflects the dearth of writings from this perspective on 'modern' institutions such as the state and its various arenas. Smith's work (2001, 2003, 2005, 2006) links the issues of corruption, kinship, development, politics and interface bureaucracy and is focused particularly on Igbo-speaking south-eastern Nigeria. Smith has analysed these issues in a number of contexts, including a donor-funded family planning programme, witchcraft and responses to it, the Biafra war, political corruption, vigilantes, ethnic nationalism and Pentecostal Christianity. His analyses provide a comprehensive overview of politics, public service provision and patterns of social change in contemporary Nigeria. Smith (2006) concentrates particularly on the issue of corruption because he argues that explaining it is central to understanding Nigerian society. I agree with this assessment: corruption, viewed in its broadest sense (as in Olivier de Sardan's (1999: 26) view of the "corruption complex", which covers all practices that offer the possibility of enrichment through contradiction of ethics of public service) permeates all facets of Nigerian life, and understanding it reveals much about issues of identity, kinship and power in contemporary Nigerian society.

The issues of identity, patronage and corruption are inextricably linked in Nigeria (Smith, 2001: 345) and these issues are also closely related to moral discourses and to the state. Extra-legal practice can be divided into two distinct types, though there is clear overlap between the two. The first type of practice can be described as patron-client-based behaviour that is rooted in 'traditional' notions of reciprocal obligation, kinship and the sharing of resources; the second is a newer form of extra-legal practice known as 419 in which those involved do so only for their own benefit or that of very close associates or kin. I will begin this section by sketching the characteristics of Smith's two types of corruption, beginning with 'traditional' patron-client-based practices, which he (2006) suggests are inevitable and even ethical responses to living in a country where almost everyone is involved in illicit activity, a conclusion that links closely with my own findings.

Smith argues that patron-clientism is the basis of Nigeria's political economy and success in contemporary Nigerian society owes much to the idea of "having people" (Smith, 2005: 30). Navigating one's way through Nigeria's notoriously difficult bureaucracy means that, rather than expecting the state to provide the service it purports to, users are more likely to look for a personal connection. Olivier de Sardan's (2009: 49) work on Francophone West Africa suggests the widespread existence of this phenomenon:

To survive in the administrative domain it is necessary to know somebody or to know somebody who knows somebody. When faced with an administrative problem that needs to be resolved, people do not try to find out about the procedure that needs to be followed, but who they need to see, someone who can pull strings for them.

Often the person who can help out is a "home person" – someone sharing one's community of origin. Even when outside this area, people tend to identify with their home community, declare allegiance to it and maintain strong ties (Gugler, 1991). "Home people" are just as important in wider society, as Smith (2005: 37) comments with regard to Igbo migrants in Kano, who make use of them in "[f]inding accommodation, securing employment, developing opportunities to establish businesses, forging ties with local creditors, and building allies to assist with problems

and resolve disputes". In fact, wealth in many African societies is viewed as much in terms of "wealth in people" as "wealth in things" (Guyer, 1995), and the modern emphasis on pursuit of wealth is regarded by many as amoral (Smith, 2006). As access to so many important commodities is mediated through personal connections, it is therefore unsurprising that maintenance of networks of patronage – especially those that are based on kinship and consequently strong – is extremely important in contemporary Nigeria. Smith (2003: 707) suggests that the reliance on kin is so strong in part because "the offices of the state are unreliable when it comes to delivering basic services and assistance through formal channels". In short, people rely on kin because they have little choice.

Contrary to the unilinear approach of much development thinking, which has argued that ties to community and place of origin are likely to recede over time, evidence suggests that, in the case of south-eastern Nigeria, these ties are becoming stronger (Smith, 2003; Gugler, 1991). Gugler (1991) reports that between 1961 and 1987 in Enugu, a large city in Igboland, ties to relatives became stronger. The number of respondents who stated that they intended to both build houses and retire away from their community of origin – key indicators of receding closeness to one's home community – declined between 1961 and 1987. Gugler puts this down to the increasing economic uncertainty of the time, which led even higher-status individuals to rely more on the economic security of their home community, but also acknowledges the spiritual significance of place of origin for many Nigerians. In addition, the impact of the Biafra war (1967-70) and the uncertainty it engendered encouraged Igbos to retreat into arenas they were sure would provide support.

Obligations to community of origin are strong and are frequently mobilised for political and economic purposes (Smith, 2003). These obligations tend to be both stronger and more often utilised than other ties such as religion, trades unions and other social groups, which are much more peripheral in Nigerians' lives (Prof. Chibueze Okoro, interview, 16 April 2007), though obviously this varies with the individual concerned. Nnoli (1978: 108) argues that this type of solidarity is felt across Nigeria's many ethnicities: the "extended family system, with its emphasis on welfare and social responsibility ... and its ethic of an individual as his brother's keeper, is common to all Nigerian peoples". Chabal (2002: 452) goes further, arguing that in Africa, "the individual cannot be conceived outside the community from which (s)he hails, however geographically distant (s)he may be from it".

Despite the close ties Nigerians feel to their home communities, there is still some ambivalence about longstanding structures of patron-clientism and the impact they have on individual desires. Smith (2006: 141) argues that Nigerians are often frustrated with the burdens of this system, the rich believing that the demands made upon them by their clients are too much and the poor suspecting that their patrons are not sharing enough of their riches. He goes on to argue, however, that the frustrations Nigerian experience with longstanding practices of patron-clientism are dwarfed by the troubling feelings they have towards the newer forms of corruption known as 419, in which beneficiaries are less bound by moral obligations of kinship and patron-clientism (ibid).

The connections people make use of to navigate their way through Nigerian bureaucracy are not confined to kinship or community of origin. The notion of obligation

is rooted in Nigeria's political economy, which is based around patron-clientism and requires continuous reciprocity between patrons and clients (Smith, 2003). While ties of community may be strong, in an environment such as a university where kin may be difficult to find, individuals must make use of other connections. This can be seen in the prevalence of factionalism and 'godfatherism' at USEN, in which patrons have obligations to clients – to support their efforts to gain promotions, committee memberships and other benefits, to assist them to ensure allocation of the courses they want to teach – and vice versa. The client's obligation to the patron in this environment is likely, first and foremost, to be loyalty and to support the patron whenever necessary, particularly in a crisis.

Smith (2006) also constructs a strong argument around changes to patterns of behaviour in Nigeria in recent years, the core of which is the rise of the type of corruption known as 419. This term originates from a section of the Nigerian legal code and originally referred only to advance-fee fraud. This is a type of fraud in which the target is persuaded to pay advance fees against the promise of a larger pay-off later. Nigeria has developed a global reputation for this kind of fraud. Within Nigeria the term now has a far broader meaning, encompassing anything that uses illusion or manipulation of the truth to facilitate personal advancement, including practices perpetrated at the highest levels of government and in the most lowly shop or police checkpoint. Smith (2006: 21-22) illustrates the ubiquity of the label by noting that practices as diverse as Nigeria's elite keeping oil refineries in a state of disrepair so they can profit from oil importation and distribution, petrol station proprietors hoarding fuel so they can take advantage of higher prices later and "urban street urchins" mixing cheaper kerosene with more expensive gasoline to increase their profits, all prompt accusations of 419. It should be commented that the fruits of 419, and the ire directed at the perpetrators, are greater the higher one goes in the social hierarchy. Practices of 419 are often contrasted with others that act to benefit communities and clients rather than the perpetrators alone and, as such, 419 is viewed by many as immoral.

Smith argues that 419 is on the increase in comparison to practices rooted in patron-clientism, of which Nigerians see it as a perversion, and suggests that Nigerians view 419 as symptomatic of a decline in moral values. In short, this complaint refers to the fact that those with influence are becoming more selfish and neglecting to support their client groups. 419 is described as having a detrimental impact on Nigeria, particularly on the mass of the population, and is a significant cause of inequality. When traditional patron-client norms remained strong, inequality would be mitigated by transfers of wealth from the haves to the have-nots. However, with the advent of 'selfish' 419, the fruits of corruption are increasingly being kept by the perpetrators. Smith (2006: 142) comments on popular responses to 419: "[a]ttacks on swanky stores and hotels, posh cars, and the residences of some of [Igbo city] Owerri's wealthiest people can be read as a kind of class warfare, targeting the most obvious symbols of corruption and inequality".

Smith posits the argument that the primary cause of 419 is the increasing reliance of Nigerians on the state as a source of wealth, a conclusion shared by Diamond (1995), a political scientist. This has caused a crisis in which traditional patron-clientism – which does not rely on the state – is increasingly unable to provide resources in comparison to those who have access to the state and are prepared to appropriate its



resources. Practices of 419 have therefore “become part of a pragmatic repertoire that ever-larger numbers of Nigerians use to exploit the contemporary political economic landscape” (2006: 226). Aside from increasing use of the state for resources and the role of the military in politics, Smith does not outline in detail the historical processes that have underpinned the rise of 419, but I would argue that the oil boom years followed by the structural adjustment era have a significant part to play. I address this in my historical analysis later in this chapter. A number of my respondents during fieldwork and other authors (Ihonvbere, 1993; Jega, 2000) argue that the period of structural adjustment marked a fundamental change in Nigerian history, in which individualism increased, leadership became less focused on national development and corruption increased. These factors point to a breakdown of traditional patron-client structures. 419 has emerged to fill this void.

### ***Morality***

Morality is central to Nigerians’ understanding of the state and its actions. This morality frequently refers to different perceptions of extra-legal practice and under which circumstances particular practices are seen as acceptable and unacceptable. These judgements are usually dependent on particular factors: whether the perpetrator is an ‘ordinary’ member of society trying to make ends meet or a member of the elite; whether the person is seeking to help a member of their kin, community or other network or is seeking financial gain; related to the previous dichotomy, whether the fruits of the corruption are shared with the community or client group or kept for oneself; and lastly, whether the action will benefit them or not. The vast majority of extra-legal activities will be viewed as moral or immoral depending on a combination of these four factors.

Within verbal discourses in Nigeria, morality is strong: when Nigerians have access to resources, they are “morally obliged to share” (Smith, 2003: 707), and to be seen as a good person one must distribute the resources one has access to. There is in fact a form of ‘moral economy’ “wherein patron-clientism is fueled and sustained by obligations to ‘home’ and ‘home people’” (Smith 2003: 706). In addition to the obligations to community, however, the persistence of long-standing traditions of loyalty and reciprocity is also partly because they have “proven to be rational and successful cultural logics” (Smith, 2006: 42). There is, therefore, a strong element of self-interest in the persistence of these patterns: they would not persist were they not functional.

During my fieldwork in Nigeria one respondent recounted an anecdote about a man with a fairly senior position in a federal ministry who spends his working life “playing by the [official] rules” and does nothing for the people in his community of origin. He returns to his community upon retirement seeking to make a new life for himself but, because he has done nothing for his fellow villagers during his time in office, when he returns “he will be lynched” (Dr Christopher Nwangwu, interview, 8 June 2007). Dr Nwangwu was seeking to illustrate the importance of supporting one’s kin and community whilst in office and the moral imperative for doing so, a sentiment echoed by Isichei (1976: 149), who comments that “an honest Chief would be stigmatised by his relatives and townsmen as a fool, a blameworthy neglecter of his and their interests”. Both these assertions illustrate the force of the African proverb quoted by Chabal and Daloz (1999: 107, note 14): “[w]hoever does not rob the state robs his kith and kin”. In Dr Nwangwu’s case the federal official did not rob the state, and his fellow

villagers perceived that, by doing so, he had stolen from them, and sought to punish him for it. It also reflects Ekeh's (1975) argument about the morality of the "primordial public" and the amorality of the "civic public", which result in a situation where appropriating the state in order to support one's kin and community is viewed as a morally correct course of action.

Similarly Okojie and Momoh (2005: 14) note that it is taken for granted, even expected, that holders of public office will use their position to enrich themselves: "it is a career failure almost if one's wealth is not furthered by public office. Such a person is regarded as 'ye ye' which in local usage means the lack of enterprise". However, while this is true, Nigerians I spoke to revealed that the term ye ye has a much broader meaning. In fact the term is seen to refer to someone who "doesn't know what they are doing" (Emmanuel Adeniyi, interview, 24 March 2007). This can mean, as Okojie and Momoh argue, that a person does not enrich themselves through public office but, equally importantly, it can mean someone who *does* enrich themselves but does not "share with his people" (ibid). Nigerians frequently condemn corruption only insofar as it fails to benefit them (Smith, 2006: 15). There is, therefore, a distinct ambivalence towards corruption among Nigerians:

[Nigerians] recognise that [corruption] undermines the country's democratic political institutions, economic development, and global reputation, yet they also realise that wealth, power, and prestige in Nigeria are commonly achieved through practices that can easily be labeled as corrupt. People frequently condemn corruption and its consequences as immoral and socially ruinous, yet they also participate in seemingly contradictory behaviors that enable, encourage, and even glorify corruption (Smith, 2006: 4-5).

These dichotomies about the moral status of different extra-legal acts have implications for my own research because they illustrate the ambiguous relationship between the university and the home communities of those working there. A hypothetical case study will illustrate this. A university lecturer who is particularly keen to support his community of origin works at the university with the primary aim of acquiring as much wealth as possible as quickly as possible. Through personal connections he gets to teach a number of courses with large student numbers and he uses this opportunity to sell handouts to students at inflated prices. He invests very little time in designing and delivering his courses and, again using personal connections, finds postgraduate students to do his marking for him. He pays them a very low wage but they continue to work for him as they hope he will be able to help them secure a job at the university at a later date. He is able to amass a large amount of money, far more than his salary would indicate he should earn. The money this lecturer earns is used in his community of origin to drill a borehole so the community can have safe drinking water. He also assists the children of members of his kindred to gain access to the university, makes a large donation to the local church and builds himself a large house.

Perspectives on his actions among those in the university will depend on a number of factors: whether they are his friend or acquaintance; whether they too participate in extra-legal practices such as selling handouts; whether they are his colleague or a student; whether they know what he does with his money. Those in his community are likely to welcome his intervention because he has shown himself to be a good patron, has helped the community to 'get up' and has also helped himself to build a large

house – not to do so would be viewed as unimpressive (Chukwuezi, 2001) and rather strange. What is of acute importance in this case study is the fact that the opinions of those in his community are likely to matter more than those of his colleagues in the university. From his perspective, therefore, he has done the right thing. A situation such as this mirrors Smith's (2006: 223) assertion that a politician who steals government money would not be accused of 419 if he used a substantial portion to help his village.

Much of my own data supports the view that 419 exerts an increasing influence on patterns of behaviour in Nigeria. This is reflected in the attitudes and experiences of my respondents during fieldwork, who predominantly advanced the view that Nigeria's public services are going through a process of decline, and increasing use of extra-legal methods of achieving success are both a symptom and a cause of this decline. This reflects Olivier de Sardan's (2009: 67) findings in Francophone West Africa, where both civil servants and users believed that the standard of public service provision was falling. Whether discourses of decline mirror actual events is a moot point. I discuss this in more detail in chapters four and five.

In addition to verbal discourses of morality, it is also interesting to analyse the way Nigerians write about corruption. In Ugwu's (2002) volume of scholarly articles on the subject it is striking how many Nigerian authors employ strongly moralistic adjectives to describe corruption: "soiled" (1); "decay" (16); "cancerous" (17); "ugly" (101); "deviant" (153). Agalamanyi (2002: 50) focuses on the impact of corruption, which, he argues, "is not only endemic, but has reached pandemic level in Nigeria. Corruption is the ocean separating us from prosperity, and good living conditions such as roads, social amenities, viable industries and employment opportunities." A number of Nigerian contributors to Ugwu's edited volume and others (such as Osoba, 1996; Okojie and Momoh, 2007) emphasise the morality surrounding the discourse of corruption in Nigeria, but omit the dichotomy between 'moral' and 'immoral' corruption emphasised by Smith. In these contributions, all corruption, whether to assist kin or for personal gain, is viewed as immoral and detrimental to Nigeria in terms of its 'moral fabric' and its development. It leans very heavily on western-inspired discourses of good and bad governance and technical solutions to Nigerian problems. What is interesting is the gap between verbal and written discourse about corruption in Nigeria, the former emphasising ambivalence and subjectivity, the latter focusing on absolute condemnations of all practice that does not adhere to the written law. This view of morality is not shared by wider society, for whom the dichotomy is much more likely to be between 'moral' and 'immoral' corruption, rather than viewing all rule-breaking as inevitably negative.

### ***Ethnicity and identity politics***

Ethnicity and identity politics are strong forces in contemporary Nigeria and, though inter-ethnic conflict was not an important factor in my empirical research – USEN, because it is a predominantly Igbo institution, was more likely to witness conflicts between Igbo sub-groups than between Igbos and non-Igbos – it is an important aspect of neopatrimonial state theory. I discuss it in detail here, and in my historical analysis of the evolution of the Nigerian state below, because it is at the heart of my analysis of the retraditionalization approach taken by many neopatrimonial state theorists. I intend to argue, through an examination of the evolution of ethnic loyalties in Nigeria, why

colonialism had a revolutionary impact on ethnic solidarities and the process of ethnicization that has taken place in Nigeria.

Ethnicity is an important marker of identity in Nigeria, but it is far from the only one. Nigerians – as elsewhere in the world – have a variety of different identities, and individuals will opt to invoke different identities at different times depending on circumstances. Some of these identities have been created administratively, both by the British colonisers and by post-independence Nigerian administrations, while others derive from what have been termed ‘primordial’ affinities but which, in actual fact, have also been, to some degree at least, created by the history of colonialism in Nigeria. At the highest level is people’s identity as Nigerians, which was created by British colonialism (Honey, 1999). Very rarely will this be anyone’s primary identity, and it has been commented that the only time Nigerians feel like one nation is when watching the national football team play (Muonagor, undated). Below this level of identity, Mustapha (2004: 10) has argued that there are seven ethnic and political cleavages in Nigeria:

[B]etween the north and the south; between the three majority ethnic groups; between these wazobia<sup>9</sup> groups on the one hand and the minority groups on the other; inter-state rivalry between states, sometimes within and sometimes between ethnic groups; inter-ethnic rivalry in a mixed state composed of minority groups of different strengths or a segment of a majority ethnicity surrounded by minority groups; intra-ethnic rivalry within each majority ethnic group, sometimes also corresponding to state boundaries and sometimes within a single state; and finally, inter-clan and intra-clan rivalries.

As Mustapha illustrates, these identities are ethnic (between and within ethnic groups) but also administrative (between different states), reflecting the fact that ethnicity is not primordial, but in fact changes significantly in response to circumstances. Rivalries that have resulted from the imposition of administrative boundaries have become both widespread and bitter (Okolie, 2003). In addition to ethnic and geographical identities, Nigerians also identify along class lines if this proves to be economically rational (Melson and Wolpe, 1971). Melson and Wolpe provide the examples of general strikes in 1945 and 1964 to illustrate their point, while Jega (2000) argues similarly that during the structural adjustment period trades unions and university students agitated for changes to government policy. In general, therefore, Nigerians choose whichever identity is most functional within each set of circumstances (Chabal and Daloz, 1999).

A 2000 survey of Nigerian public opinion found that ethnicity was the strongest type of identity declared, 48.2% of the sample identifying themselves in terms of their ethnicity, 28.4% by their class and occupation, while 21% chose a religious identity (Lewis and Bratton, 2000: 9). What is perhaps more important, however, is the fact that different identities will be invoked depending on what is expedient. This often occurs when individuals attempt to find a “personal angle” (Blundo, 2006: 809) through which they can extract a benefit from a street-level bureaucrat. In these situations, the relationship that brings the two people closest together is most likely to elicit a positive response. A respondent of mine during fieldwork was able to gain admission to USEN because he had attended the same school as the person assessing his application, while another

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<sup>9</sup> Wazobia is the term used in Nigeria to refer to its three largest ethnic groups. The word derives from the meanings of the English word ‘come’ in Yoruba (wa), Hausa (zo) and Igbo (bia).

did the same through originating from the same state. A similar process takes place in society more generally. Gugler (1975, cited in Gugler, 1991: 408) argues that Igbo people “may support their village against a neighboring village, the north of Anambra State against the West, Anambra State against neighboring Imo State, or Igbo against other major ethnic groups in Nigeria”. Igwara (2001: 93) suggests that even when some groups who have traditionally viewed themselves as outside the Igbo group – such as those from Asaba on the western bank of the Niger River – acknowledge Igbo identity, they continue to “assert their separate identities in a pan-Igbo environment”.

One of the most important points to make concerns the relationship between inter and intra-ethnic rivalry. As I discuss in more detail below, many of Nigeria’s ethnic groups were to a large degree ‘created’ as a result of colonialism. There is, therefore, still a large degree of rivalry between sub-groups of these and other ethnic groups, though it is strongest within the Igbo and the minority groups of Nigeria’s ‘middle belt’ (Mustapha, 2002a). Honey (1999) also points out that local identity is becoming more important than pan-ethnic identity, particularly among the large ethnic groups of the south. For Igwara (2001: 93), Nigerian ethnic groups “are not solidary groups in conflict with each other, they are also groups in conflict with themselves”. This viewpoint is supported by my fieldwork, in which conflicts between Igbo sub-groups are much more important than between the Igbo and other groups. It also illustrates the propensity of Nigerians to identify with increasingly smaller and smaller groups (Maier, 2000: 279) – perhaps, in the Igbo case, a product of the fact that before the arrival of the colonialists they lived in small, segmented communities.

The way Nigerians choose to identify themselves according to circumstances is a powerful indicator of the economic rationality of their responses as opposed to affinity with a supposed primordial ethnicity. Opting to invoke different identities at different times – something that has happened in Nigeria since the colonial period – suggests that these identities have become commodities to be utilised to gain access to resources. As the examples of the students who gained entry to USEN on the basis of, respectively, having attended the same school and originating from the same state as the official they sought to convince suggest, shared identity is also a powerful force in contemporary Nigeria. Even such outwardly abstract connections as these are able to motivate feelings of obligation based on an idea of ‘our people’.

### **Nigerian governance: an historical perspective**

An important aim of this thesis is to understand the influences that have given rise to the current functioning of the Nigerian state: the ‘why’, in addition to the already analysed ‘what’ and ‘how’. In part this is an explicit effort to refute the retraditionalization viewpoint of some neopatrimonial state scholars (particularly Chabal and Daloz, 1999, 2006), and to highlight the colonial and independence periods as crucial in the development of the contemporary Nigerian state. Clearly such analysis is difficult as the complexity and fluidity of social phenomena make establishing cause and effect extremely inexact, especially when one is seeking to draw parallels between contemporary society and patterns of social relations that developed hundreds of years ago. As Schatzberg (2001: 204) argues about Africa more generally, the huge colonial rupture and post-colonial influence mean that “it is today virtually impossible to discern what influences are primarily endogenous and which are mostly exogenous”.

Nonetheless, the radical changes introduced by the colonisers make the origins of certain patterns of behaviour possible to identify.

### ***Pre-colonial Nigeria***

Understanding the pre-colonial period is important for this thesis because, though colonialism was a critical rupture in Nigerian history, pre-colonial patterns of rule continue to exert an important influence, albeit in a form different from before. To deny this would be to suggest, as some British missionaries and educators incorrectly did, that they were simply writing on a *tabula rasa* (Coleman, 1965: 114). Gaining an understanding of the pre-colonial period is, however, rather difficult, chiefly because written records of pre-colonial Nigeria are rare, primarily as a result of the absence of written script in most of the country at the time (Kohli, 2004; Afigbo, 2005).<sup>10</sup> My analysis of pre-colonial Nigeria – which, of course, was not known as Nigeria at the time, this appellation only coming about as a result of colonialism – will focus on the diversity of forms of rule that existed between Nigeria's numerous ethnic groups, numerical estimates of which range from 250 to over 400 (Mustapha, 2004: 3). I focus on this issue because, first, it enables analysis of the changing forms of Nigerian governance, and second, because the histories of Nigeria's ethnic groups have created a path dependence for subsequent processes, particularly British colonial attitudes and postcolonial state formation. Understanding the diversity of pre-colonial rule is essential to assess subsequent changes.

There was significant diversity in societies and forms of leadership in pre-colonial Nigeria, ranging from the Islamic Sokoto Caliphate to "militaristic" Ibadan and "societies based on clan, village and 'stateless' systems of governance" (Mustapha, 2002a: 153). Substantial differences existed between Nigeria's three dominant ethnic groups, the Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo. Okoli (1980: 5-6) characterises the three pre-colonial political systems as follows: the Hausa operated a highly centralized, hierarchical system of rule that was based on deference and subordination of subjects; the Yoruba political system was pyramidal, in that there was a high level of participation in politics but also a well-defined chieftaincy system and a fairly complex system of organisation; Igbo systems were segmentary and were notable for their democratic and participatory nature: all adult males took part in deliberations. With the exception of the Hausa these groups did not form large-scale, organised political economies but instead consisted of small, decentralised political units.

However, Chabal and Daloz (2006: 264-265) argue that, despite the differences between pre-colonial Nigerian forms of governance – which they acknowledge – there were numerous elements common to all these systems:

Above all there was little of the kind of political differentiation, the type of institutionalisation, and the bureaucratisation that may have developed elsewhere in the world. Of course there were in Nigeria strong centres of power, which controlled relatively large territories. Yet such political systems never remotely evolved in the direction of a State differentiated from society ... such systems turned on a notion of legitimacy which was primarily underpinned by exchanges of personal loyalty,

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<sup>10</sup> The Hausa are an important exception to this. Hausa language was written in Arabic script well before the arrival of British colonialists (Riney, 1998).

ascriptive solidarity and particularistic reciprocity between patrons and clients. Nor did the distinction between public and private make any sense.

For the purposes of clarity, it is important to define what Chabal and Daloz (2006: 228) refer to as differentiation from society:

This involved ... the emergence of a clear distinction between public and private spheres. As Weber made plain, the rise of the State marked the end of patrimonialism—that is, a break with the logic of personal allegiance in which ‘patrimonial servants’ owed labour and allegiance to their ‘patrons’. Such a development only became possible when recruitment to the bureaucracy was based on professional merit and competence, rewarded by commensurate salaries and career prospects independent from the vagaries of politics.

The assertion that this type of politics did not exist in pre-colonial Nigeria is supported by Coleman (1965) who suggests that, despite their diversity, Nigerian ethnic groups were all run on the basis of principles of kinship at the local level. Only higher in social stratification systems did differences between ethnic groups become apparent. Olivier de Sardan (1999: 31), in a discussion of pre-colonial Africa more generally, comments that there was a general lack of tradition of a “public domain”, but does not elaborate on the characteristics of this phenomenon.

Chabal and Daloz – in direct contrast to Olivier de Sardan – argue further that colonialism did not significantly alter patterns of rule among Nigeria’s ethnic groups. In this section I endeavour to assess the strength of two related elements of their argument: first, whether states emancipated from society developed in pre-colonial Nigeria, and particularly whether they functioned on the basis of patron-clientism; and second, whether colonialism has significantly altered these patterns. I address the first claim by examining the pre-colonial political systems and culture of Nigeria’s three main ethnic groups. I have chosen to concentrate on these groups because there is significant difference between them, particularly in terms of their styles of rule, and because, as Mustapha (2004: 4) has argued, other ethnic groups tend to coalesce around the ‘big three’, giving Nigeria “a tripolar ethnic structure which forms the main context for ethnic mobilization and contestation”. I deal with the second claim in the *Colonial Nigeria* section below.

The evidence that a state differentiated from society failed to develop in the Hausa-speaking region of Nigeria appears clear. Hausa society has traditionally been hierarchically organised, with significant power being in the hands of the ruler. Political leadership was hereditary (King, 2001). Status, opportunities and acceptable behaviour were all conditioned by family relations and society was based around lineage groups (Spalding, 2000), while the Emirs ran their domains as “extension[s] of the household” (Kohli, 2004: 298). Society was arranged in a rigidly hierarchical manner and one’s position in the hierarchy was dependent on birth, not achievement: “the line between chief and commoner remains high and uncrossable” (Miles, 1994: 151). The overall pattern, according to Spalding (2000: 66), was one of patron-clientism “involving mutual benefits and obligations such as protection, mediating services and general sustenance given by the patron, and political support and menial labor provided by the client”. Success for the commoner was largely tied to his clientelistic relationships, which were an inescapable aspect of social life (Nnoli, 1978). Nnoli (1978: 135) further

describes the commoner without a patron as “not merely a deviant but a rebel, since he admitted of no personal allegiance”. The fact that the Hausa formed large, centralized polities does not mean that these institutions were based on meritocracy. Kinship and clientelism were central and formed the basis for decision-making.

The Yoruba – an ethnicity composed of linguistically and culturally similar groups in south-western Nigeria who were nonetheless treated as one group by the British – operated a political system in which there were strong kings, states and empires, but also commoner chiefs who could select and, if necessary, depose the king (Spalding, 2000). Access to economic resources was related to social status (*ibid*), which could be both ascribed and achieved, so personal ability played a part in status achievement. Once again, however, patron-client relationships, patterns of deference and obligations to family were essential to achievement in Yoruba communities (Aronson, 1978; Eades, 1980). Social relations can be viewed as a combination of elements common to Hausa and Igbo communities: there was emphasis, similar to Igbo groups, on occupational excellence and attainment while, common to the Hausa, political clientage was also recognised. Social mobility among the Yoruba was higher than the Hausa but lower than the Igbo (Nnoli, 1978). These characteristics suggest that within the Yoruba ethnic group a state differentiated from society also failed to develop.

Patterns of behaviour and community among the Igbo ethnic group were very different from both Hausa and Yoruba, as the section below outlines. I discuss the Igbo in pre-colonial Nigeria in much greater depth than the other ethnic groups, reflecting the geographical focus of my study. Further, I focus on pre-colonial Igbo norms and values because, based on a notion of retraditionalization, they could be expected to retain some power in contemporary Igboland, such as within its university system, the focus of this study. The fact that many characteristics of pre-colonial Igbo communities are no longer witnessed illustrates the weakness of the retraditionalization paradigm.

As with most other Nigerian ethnic groups, understanding the pre-colonial political systems of the Igbo can be difficult, primarily due to the lack of a written script (Afigbo, 2005: 155). What we do know comes primarily from ethnographies written by Europeans during the colonial era and its immediate aftermath (such as Basden, 1966 [1938], 1982 [1921]; Forde and Jones, 1950; Ottenberg, 1959, 1967; Meek, 1937) and postcolonial accounts written by Nigerians, primarily by Igbos themselves (such as Achebe, 2001; JEE Njoku, 1990; Uchendu, 1965; Afigbo, 2005; UJ Njoku, 2005; Nnoli, 1978). In addition a number of more recent, non-Nigerian analyses (such as Smith, 2001, 2003, 2005, 2006; Kohli, 2004; Chabal and Daloz, 2006) make reference to pre-colonial patterns of rule, though their sources are frequently the same ones I have cited above. As I noted in chapter one of this thesis, it is important to critically examine the early anthropologies of Nigeria, and Africa more generally, as some have argued that they are tinged with racism (Rigby, 1996: 3) or do not provide “any sort of guide to the African past” (Ranger, 1983: 262). In my analysis I have chosen to draw particularly on analyses written by Igbos themselves, as this both provides an insider viewpoint and refutes accusations of racism. Commenting on pre-colonial Igbo culture or governance can also be difficult because of the differences between Igbo sub-groups (Uchendu, 1965; Afigbo, 2005). Each Igbo community was based on patrilineal clans or lineages, had its own government, was relatively independent from other communities (Ottenberg, 1959; Achebe, 2001) and was often suspicious of or hostile to



neighbouring village-groups (Uchendu, 1965). Communities were autonomous and accepted no influence from outsiders (Uchendu, 1965). The village-groups considered themselves independent to such a degree that the pan-ethnic group known as the Igbo did not really exist until the colonial era. Ohadike (1994) comments that numerous groups of what are now known as *ndi Igbo* (Igbo people) would have rejected this title at the time. Despite the segmentation of communities and the differences between them, some characteristics were common to most Igbo communities, particularly those on the western side of the Niger River. These include the democratic nature of rule; the relationship between individual and group advancement; and the role of kinship in the community.

The first important characteristic is the democratic nature of Igbo rule. The vast majority of Igbo communities did not have monarchs and those that did (usually those on the western side of the Niger) were more like presidents of the village-group and elders' councils (Afigbo, 2005). Antipathy to monarchy within Igbo communities has been well-documented, Achebe (2001: 16) asserting that this impulse was so strong that some Igbo people would name their sons Ezebuilo, meaning "a king is an enemy". Subservience and unquestioning deference to authority was frowned upon in Igbo communities, who believed it signified weakness and lack of masculinity (Nnoli, 1978: 132). Democracy, understood as popular participation in the decision-making of a community, took place at two levels in Igboland: the village and the village-group. At the village level direct democracy was practiced, while representative democracy was practiced at the village-group level. Direct democracy among the Igbo took the form of meetings involving all male members of the community, with a council of lineage heads at its centre (Afigbo, 2005). These meetings would involve debate followed by withdrawal for consultation amongst this inner council. This group would then return to present their decision to the general assembly, which would show acceptance with applause. If the decision was "greeted with jeers and protests the group returned to re-consult. This process would be repeated as often as it was necessary to achieve a consensus" (Afigbo, 2005: 161).

At the village-group level indirect democracy was applied. This took place in the form of a village-group assembly made up of representatives of all the member villages (Afigbo, 2005). As with decision-making at the village level, consensus formed the basis of decisions, but each village was seen as autonomous and did not have to accept decisions it did not agree with or take part in (Afigbo, 2005). The type of governance at both village and village-group level illustrates the comparatively unhierarchical nature of leadership in pre-colonial Igboland (Ottenberg, 1959: 141).

The second characteristic of pre-colonial Igbo communities was the relationship between individual and group success. Despite their democratic nature, Igbo groups were individualistic, with strong achievement orientation (Uchendu, 1965). Afigbo (2005: 164, original emphasis) describes competition as the Igbo "*life principle*". Status could be gained through wealth acquisition (Nnoli, 1978), which would allow the holder to access traditionally-valued status symbols such as the taking of titles (Uchendu, 1965; Afigbo, 2005). Positions of authority in pre-colonial Igboland were decided on the basis of achievement rather than heredity (Uchendu, 1965; Ottenberg, 1959), with "men of singular ability" being granted wide political influence, their influence depending on "tendering good advice and having it accepted by their peers" (Tignor,

1979: 191). Each individual had the same opportunities for success except the *osu*, a small group of slaves who Uchendu (1965: 89) terms “the greatest contradiction of Igbo equalitarian ideology”. Individualism, however, was also rooted in group action, in that individual success, particularly outside the community, brought status to all (Njoku, 1990). Joseph (1987: 54) suggests that this pattern of behaviour is common in contemporary Nigeria: “[t]he fundamental social process in Nigeria is one in which these two propositions – (a) I want to get ahead and prosper and (b) my group (ethnic, regional, linguistic) must get ahead and prosper – cannot logically be separated”. The combination of ties to community and individual status achievement is summarised by Smith (2004: 570), who comments that individual excellence is valued “but only if one’s achievements are shared to the benefit of one’s people”. My analysis suggests that this type of behaviour has pre-colonial origins, though the nature and significance of the relationship between individual and community prosperity is likely to have radically different characteristics in the post-colonial world.

Kinship played a central role in Igbo governance and understanding its role is important because it continues to play a key function in contemporary Nigeria. Decision-making took place on the basis of communities. These communities were intimately linked by virtue of the fact that they were viewed as having one common ancestor. As a result, the community was “a sort of spiritual commonwealth” in which “politics and government were just another name for the process of regulating normal life among brothers” (Afigbo, 2005: 163). Kinship among Igbo people is so strong that “the living are linked to the dead by blood union that even death cannot dissolve” (ibid, 162). Each individual was dependent on his kin group, and would desire to make “his own contribution to the group to which he owes so much” (Uchendu, 1965: 34). Kinship remains a vital force in contemporary Igboland, not least as a method by which individuals can gain access to services provided by the state, including higher education (Smith, 2003). The strength of kinship in contemporary Igboland, and Nigeria more generally, is a product of both the strength of the concept in pre-colonial times and the structure of the contemporary state that make utilising kin a rational strategy for accessing resources.

Assessment of pre-colonial Igbo communities reveals that Chabal and Daloz’s contention that a state differentiated from society failed to develop is largely true; Afigbo’s comment about Igbo government being a way to regulate life between brothers illustrates this well, while Tignor (1979) argues directly that Igbo groups did not have autonomous bureaucracies. This situation appears to have developed because the size of pre-colonial Igbo communities meant that such a state would have been unnecessary: families, lineage groups and villages contributed to governance by promoting decisions that would benefit them, and the lineage group or village would achieve consensus based on the views of each group. Objective arbitration did not develop because it was not necessary, though it could be argued that the elders’ groups performed this function. However, even their decisions were subject to the will of the community.

However, one important element of Chabal and Daloz’s characterisation that appears not to have developed in Igboland is clientelism. Hierarchy of the type common in Hausa communities would have been frowned upon among the Igbo, where the struggle for wealth was “characterised by fierce individual struggle” as opposed to

achievement through “climbing the social apron strings of the Emirs” (Nnoli, 1978: 109). Dieter Neubert (personal communication, 24 July 2009) suggests further that based on material about Kenya and Rwanda it appears that clientelism was much less common in pre-colonial segmentary communities than in more organised polities, but that this phenomenon was not written about by the anthropologists of the time because it did not exist: there was no reason for scholars to remark on the lack of clientelism because describing what did exist, rather than what didn’t, was their goal. Indeed, my examination of pre-colonial ethnographies of Igbo communities reveals no mention of clientelistic relations.

This historical analysis illustrates that, among the three largest ethnic groups living in the land that became Nigeria, a state differentiated from society, with a clear distinction between public and private spheres, failed to develop. This seems to give credence to Chabal and Daloz’s retraditionalization argument. However, their contention that these systems operated on the basis of ascriptive solidarity and particularistic reciprocity between patrons and clients (2006: 265) is weaker, particularly in the case of the Igbo, within whose communities patron-client relations were not well established in the pre-colonial period. Modern clientelism in Igboland appears to have no precursor in the pre-colonial era and can therefore have only developed as a result of the imposition of colonial bureaucracy and alterations in social relations that accompanied colonialism. By contrast, in the Hausa-speaking areas of Nigeria patron-client structures were the basis upon which government functioned. This leads to two separate conclusions. First, contemporary clientelism in Igboland is largely as a result of the colonial era. Second, this evidence supports Tignor’s (1979) argument that the impact of colonialism on segmentary, acephalous political systems was greater than upon hierarchical, bureaucratic ones. Both these arguments act to refute the retraditionalization thesis.

A final important issue to consider with regard to ethnicity in pre-colonial Nigeria is the relationships between ethnic groups, because ethnic competition and conflict are such features of contemporary Nigeria. There is some degree of difference in the views of scholars on this topic. Mustapha (2004: 5) argues that linguistic and political fragmentation characterised pre-colonial Nigeria, while Coleman (1965) suggests that antagonism and hostility marked relations between Igbo and Ibibio and Ibibio and Efik ethnic groups in south-eastern Nigeria. For Mustapha (2002a), however, this ethnic fragmentation was not of the same form that it took in subsequent eras: colonialism had the “consequence of accentuating the divisions between different groups, and converting conflict from a mere potential to a reality of everyday life” (Mustapha 2002a: 153). This took place through the imposition of different political, social and administrative policies in different regions of the country, which has encouraged a history of “inclusion and exclusion, unification and differentiation, accommodation and rejection” (ibid: 157). As Mustapha remarks (ibid: 153), the scourge of “tribalism” was not a natural state. King (2001) argues similarly that in pre-colonial Katsina in northern Nigeria, a multi-ethnic city-state, territorial identification was more important than ethnicity, while Nnoli (1978) suggests that there was an assimilationist streak in the pre-colonial relations of Nigerian peoples, evidenced by such occurrences as the fact that the Fulani had begun to speak Hausa and there was an intermixing of culture at the boundaries of a number of Nigeria’s ethnic groups – the opposite viewpoint to that of Coleman. This suggests that a situation in which ethnic groups were mutually and

implacably antagonistic, as appears today, may have pre-colonial origins, at least in some geographical areas. But these differences were intensified by British colonialism, an issue I address in the next section.

### ***Colonial Nigeria***

It is difficult to overstate the importance of the period of British colonial rule, which lasted from the declaration of Lagos as a crown colony in 1861 until formal independence on 1 October 1960, on the character of contemporary Nigeria. This period fundamentally altered patterns of Nigerian governance, bureaucracy, public service provision and relationships within and between Nigeria's many ethnic groups. Many, if not all, of the characteristics of politics, state and society in contemporary Nigeria can be traced back to the colonial era and its relationship with pre-colonial structures. In this section I examine two key issues: bureaucracy and governance, and ethnicity, both of which have a direct impact on the broader discussions contained in this thesis.

#### ***Bureaucracy and governance***

The network of Nigerian government and bureaucracy has its roots in the colonial period. The process through which the British colonised Nigeria was slow and piecemeal rather than being clearly calculated and the primary concern of the colonialists was how to run Nigeria as cheaply as possible (Orji, 2008; Kohli, 2004). What is particularly interesting for this thesis is how administration and bureaucracy was developed at the local level, how it related to forms of administration that already existed and the forms of governance that emerged from this relationship.

The British attempted to replicate their domestic system of local government in Nigeria, though the models imposed in Nigeria were based not on the model of local government actually employed in England, but rather on an ideal-type model that had probably never existed (Ottenberg, 1967). This system made "virtually no concessions ... to traditional cultural practices" (ibid: 27). The British imposed different administrative apparati on Northern and Southern Nigeria, primarily due to different autochthonous patterns of rule. They wished to impose a system of indirect rule across the country, whereby authority would be transferred to local chiefs, which would reduce the number of British officials necessary to retain in Nigeria, thereby reducing costs. In the north, where large, organised states existed, the British were content to allow the Emirs to continue to govern. In the south-west, the systems of chiefs necessary for indirect rule "either existed or could be created" (Kohli, 2004: 304). However in the rest of the south, including the Igbo-speaking areas, the lack of pre-existing leadership – due, in the case of the Igbo and some other ethnic groups, to the democratic nature of politics and consequent lack of individual leadership – meant that local leaders had to be imposed. This was done through the system of warrant chiefs. As my research is focused on the Igbo-speaking region of Nigeria, I will concentrate particularly on the modes of bureaucracy imposed in this region. In addition, there is not scope in this thesis to discuss in detail the historical changes that arose in other regions of Nigeria as a result of colonialism.

As noted above, the warrant chiefs were imposed because the British wanted to implement a system of indirect rule. But Uchendu (1965: 46) suggests that the British made the mistake of imposing new rulers because they "did not understand the

traditional political institutions of the [Igbo] people [and] naively concluded that they were living in 'ordered anarchy'. This is consistent with the British view of customary authority across Africa: "[i]t presumed a king at the center of every polity, a chief on every piece of administrative ground, and a patriarch in every homestead or kraal" (Mamdani, 1996: 39). The acephalous, segmentary, ultra-democratic (Agu, 1989) political life of the Igbo, however, was too different for the colonialists to comprehend, and "anything that did not meet European standards had to be destroyed, not developed" (Ohadike, 1994: 153). Perhaps this lack of understanding of Igbo social organisation contributed to Lord Lugard, the Governor of colonial Nigeria, suggesting that the Igbos "had not developed beyond the state of savagery" (Lord Lugard, 1922, cited in Tignor, 1993).

There was an absence of consistent criteria for the appointment of warrant chiefs, which created numerous problems. Some appointments were of "those who had impressed the District Commissioner with their courage to come forward and meet the Europeans" (Nwabueze, 1963: 70), while in another area a warrant chief was appointed on the basis of his strong physical features (Orji, 2008: 59). These criteria were not likely to produce chiefs who had social legitimacy and, indeed, Njoku (2005: 105) argues that some warrant chiefs were in fact "social misfits", while James Okafor, one of my fieldwork respondents, suggested that many warrant chiefs were thieves. Tignor (1993) describes many warrant chiefs as aggressive and suggests that they carried out their duties by extracting resources from the rest of the population. Similarly Nzimiro (1971) argues that the original stimulus for Igbos to work for the colonial state was financial as opposed to for the service of their communities.

The method of selecting warrant chiefs produced a cadre of rulers lacking social legitimacy in their communities. Nwabueze (1963) notes that those who had the courage to meet their new rulers lacked traditional authority in their communities. This presented a problem in communities that retained longstanding norms of locally-generated, largely democratic governance. Lack of local legitimacy led to widespread popular rejection of the warrant chiefs (Orji, 2008), which came to a head in 1929 when large numbers of women rioted in the city of Aba in protest at the imposition of taxation. Tignor (1979: 195) suggests that the riot illustrated the "pent-up hostility to the rule of the chiefs". Njoku argues that aspects of the warrant chief system have influenced contemporary bureaucracy in south-eastern Nigeria. Its features were:

[A]rrogance of power, exploitation, being above the people, deriving from outside the community, aiming to satisfy other forces to the disadvantage of the local environment, paying little attention to local challenges of the people, being above local control, feeling little or no accountability to the immediate environment and above all, working just to make money (Njoku, 2005: 112).

Njoku contends that the entire practice of government in south-eastern Nigeria has been tainted by the warrant chief period. The accountability between ruler and ruled that existed in the pre-colonial period was removed from the structures of power, a feature that remains today and is illustrated by the fact that the state in the immediate post-colonial period was viewed as "a stranger government with foreign forms of operation" (Ottenberg, 1967: 37) and working for it still seen as "white man's work" (Njoku, 2005; Okoli, 1980; Wilson Nnaji, interview, 26 September 2007). The situation

was also difficult for Nigerians working in the colonial administration who, in effect, operated in two separate systems and had to try and get by in both (Cohen, 1980), a situation Ekeh (1975: 100) has described as the greatest difficulty facing western-educated Africans. This situation is described by Ekeh (2002: 168) as the Obi complex, after the protagonist of Achebe's novel *No Longer at Ease* (1960), who struggles to reconcile his seemingly conflicting positions in 'modern' western life in Lagos and 'traditional' life in his community of origin. For Cohen (1980: 81), existing in these two spheres simultaneously was impossible:

African officials were articulated into [the colonial] system, yet lived in another system as well. Both political systems had their own rules, sanctions, and rewards. Abiding by both meant breaking rules in both. Not to raise taxes in Nigeria would cost the local official his job; but under the colonial regime he was given no staff, no allowances to collect the taxes, merely the obligation to do so. Thus, in order to collect them, he had to keep a retinue, and to do this he had to use (embezzle if you like) some of the receipts. Furthermore, his pre-colonial African superiors required tribute if he was to stay in office. To pay for these, he needed sources of revenue considered illegal.

Cohen suggests that the disarticulation between the two systems meant constant conflict and therefore "under colonialism Africans learned how to live and operate under a system in which illegitimacy was normal" (Cohen, 1980: 81). Cohen's analysis also suggests the interpenetration of the colonial and traditional spheres, which reflects both other analyses of contemporary African political systems (such as Bratton and van de Walle, 1997; Smith, 2001; Erdmann and Engel, 2005) and my own research at USEN.

The first characteristic of contemporary bureaucracy in Igboland that I have examined, the lack of accountability of leaders resulting from the imposition of the warrant chiefs, is a direct cause of a second characteristic that has been inherited from the colonial era: corruption. The warrant chief system, Njoku contends, caused corruption because it engendered a system whereby authority in the community moved away from working for the wellbeing of the community towards working for the colonial master. Warrant chiefs, Afigbo (1972) suggests, engaged in extensive corruption, extortion and oppression, while Njoku (2005) argues similarly that these men grew rich illicitly. Justice, which had previously been administered in line with the long-held beliefs of the community "became a commodity to be sold to the highest bidder" (Njoku, 2005: 104). This process marked the beginning of the separation of Igbo society into two spheres – the 'official', which evolved from colonial rule, and the 'traditional', which emanated from practices and norms of longstanding – that were marked as much by different systems of morality as different administrative practices. This view is very similar to that of Ekeh (1975), who argued that this process gave rise to the development of the "civic" and "primordial" publics and a system of morality in which taking from the former to support the latter was viewed as legitimate. As I discuss in detail in chapters four and five, this type of behaviour is common at USEN and the belief in the moral justification of taking from the state to support one's home community is widespread.

By contrast Ekpo (1979) stresses pre-colonial influences in the case of corruption in Nigerian bureaucracy, suggesting that its origins lie in "traditional values" such as clan reciprocity and obligations, "the Nigerian obsession with wealth" and the tradition of gift giving in pre-colonial societies. He argues that numerous Nigerian ethnic groups lived

in pre-colonial societies in which there was significant social inequality marked by deferential behaviour and that gift giving was a primary means of “rewarding, influencing and manipulating one’s superior” (Ekpo, 1979: 182). This pattern, Ekpo argues, plays out in contemporary bureaucracy. I would argue that it is possible that the tradition of gift-giving has some part to play in contemporary bureaucratic corruption in Nigeria. But two salient points are of note. First, as Blundo and Olivier de Sardan (2005: 36) note, Ekpo confuses the exchange of gifts within patron-client relationships with corruption. Second, as others (such as Olivier de Sardan, 1999) have commented, the change and amalgamation of pre-colonial practices such as gift giving with other influences from the colonial and post-colonial eras must be taken into account. Ekpo, who argues that the tradition of gift giving is recrudescing appears to argue that gift giving performs the same functions in contemporary Nigeria as it had in the pre-colonial era. However, culture is a process of constant change, not a static phenomenon that is handed down within communities despite outside influence (Douglas, 2004).

A third characteristic inherited from colonialism in south-eastern Nigeria is brutality and arrogance of power (Njoku, 2005: 107). This arose partly as a result of the segmentation that existed between those Africans who had succeeded in the colonial service and those who had not. This segmentation was marked by widely differing lifestyles, with the elite taking over the ostentatious lifestyles of their colonial predecessors (Cohen, 1980). Olivier de Sardan (2009) has also commented in his research on Francophone West Africa on the contemporary manifestation of this: the contempt and hostility shown to anonymous users of public services. He links this process directly to the colonial period because the new African bureaucratic class took on the privileges and arrogant attitudes of their (in this case French) predecessors. This characteristic – treating anonymous users with contempt – continues to characterise much of Nigerian interface bureaucracy today. It could be argued that the way many lecturers treat their students at USEN – often as little more than customers from whom to extract money, and certainly without a great deal of respect – is a manifestation of this contempt.

A fourth element of colonial bureaucracy that has endured in Nigeria is the role of intermediaries, which can still be seen at USEN through the role of agents. In the colonial era, intermediaries were those clerks, interpreters and other members of the lower ranks of the colonial bureaucracy who “bridged the linguistic and cultural gaps that separated European colonial officials from subject populations” (Lawrance et al, 2006: 4). Pratten (2006) argues that the role of intermediaries began with colonial-era African clerks who acted as gateways to the court system and “hence exercised great influence over these important sites of struggle for access to resources and the meanings of social relationships and authority” (ibid: 220). Blundo (2006) points out that *agents d’affaires* in the French West African legal system were instituted in the colonial era as individuals who could, in the absence of lawyers, assist the parties involved and plead in front of legal institutions. In contemporary Senegal Blundo describes these individuals as ‘touts,’ illustrating the direct lineage between official colonial-era intermediaries and their unofficial contemporary counterparts. Olivier de Sardan (1999: 38) takes a slightly contrasting viewpoint, arguing that intermediaries –

as he argues is the case with many characteristics of contemporary Africa – have origins that illustrate a combination of influences:

The cultural logics of brokerage thus operate by means of an historical syncretism between pre-colonial practices (cf. the traditional role of mediators in family or political negotiations), the colonial heritage (cf. the necessary breaching of the gap between the colonised and the colonisers), and post-colonial transformations (cf. development aid).

I have no evidence of the role of mediators in pre-colonial Igboland, so cannot assess the veracity of this argument, and development aid has a marginal role in public service provision in Nigeria. This argument therefore suggests the colonial era as the primary origin of intermediaries in interface bureaucracy in Igboland.

A fifth characteristic inherited from the colonial operation of Nigerian bureaucracy is excessive hierarchy. Large distinctions existed between upper and lower levels of public service in colonial Nigeria (Cohen, 1980). These distinctions were supported by “different allowances, different leave policies, separate washrooms, separate housing, pay differentials, and divergent general lifestyles”. Cohen further asserts that salary differentials between the lowest and highest rungs of the Nigerian bureaucracy were approximately three times greater than in the US (1980: 75). Hierarchical distinctions of this type had not existed in pre-colonial Igboland, though the Hausa were known for having more hierarchical modes of operation. Strength of hierarchy can still be witnessed in contemporary Nigerian bureaucracy, such as within the university system. Within the departments of both the universities in Igboland where I have worked there exists a rigid hierarchy in which each member of the department is either higher or lower than each other member. A total of six promotions are needed to rise from the bottom to the top of the Nigerian academic ladder.<sup>11</sup> Cohen (1980: 76) argues that excessive hierarchy is a direct cause of the utilisation of non-merit criteria for promotion in Nigerian public service, but fails to explain why this is the case.

The destruction of pre-colonial Igbo governance and replacement with the warrant chiefs represented a decisive break with what had gone before (Tignor, 1979: 190) because in Igboland colonial authority did not “resonate with any aspect of tradition” (Mamdani, 1996: 41). Official decisions were now in the hands of individual leadership rather than collective decision-making and those individuals had little local legitimacy. Tignor goes on to argue that the discontinuities between pre-colonial and colonial systems were more acute in Igbo and other “chiefless” systems than in societies with chiefs or which were more hierarchical because in those polities “pre-colonial government by chiefs was retained rather than supplanted” (Tignor, 1979). The Igbo and other ethnic groups such as the Ibibio who employed democratic governance therefore underwent much more radical change as a result of colonialism than did Nigeria’s other ethnic groups.

As noted above, Chabal and Daloz (2006) argue differently. They suggest that colonialism did not bring about systematic and radical change to pre-colonial “political and administrative mechanisms” (2006: 265) in Nigeria and these patterns can

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<sup>11</sup> The hierarchy of academic positions in Nigerian universities is: Professor; Reader; Senior Lecturer; Lecturer 1; Lecturer 2; Assistant Lecturer; Graduate Assistant.



therefore still be witnessed in the contemporary era. They argue that there are two reasons for this and they lie in the two types of colonial rule implemented by the British. They suggest (2006: 265) that the first – indirect rule – depended on “existing political dispensations”, while the second – direct rule – was appropriated and “Africanised” by those in charge. In the former case, there is some truth in their argument because the Emirs of northern Nigeria were permitted to continue ruling as they had previously (Kohli, 2004). In the latter, Chabal and Daloz appear to conflate ‘Africanisation’ with practices such as excessive hierarchy, corruption, arrogance of power and ‘informality’ that others (such as Cohen, 1980; Olivier de Sardan, 2009; Tignor, 1979) have argued are direct results of the way colonialism operated, and were in fact handed down by colonial bureaucrats. Chabal and Daloz’s argument is similar to that advanced by Bayart (1991), who argues that colonial governance in Africa was appropriated by local groups. However, this view fails to take into account the fact that those who did the appropriating – the warrant chiefs in Igboland – were not viewed as legitimate by their communities, in direct contrast to the legitimacy of pre-colonial village-based governance. Appropriation by the mass of the population did not take place, while, simultaneously, those who did work for the colonial and post-colonial government inherited norms from the outgoing colonialists. Analysis of literature reveals that the alienation of Nigerians from their state and the consequent legitimacy of state appropriation – central characteristics of the Nigerian neopatrimonial state – have their roots in the colonial method of administration. Indeed, the hallmarks of the neopatrimonial state defined by, among others, Chabal and Daloz, have remarkable similarities with Njoku’s (2005) descriptions of the work of warrant chiefs in Igboland during the colonial period, in particular corruption, lack of accountability of rulers to ruled and using the state as a means for personal enrichment.

Moreover, there is a logical problem with the approach of Chabal and Daloz. They state that pre-colonial Nigeria was strongly heterogeneous (2006: 264) and that colonialism did little to alter patterns of rule. This would suggest that, for instance, hierarchy should be stronger in the public sector of contemporary northern Nigeria, while democratic decision-making would flourish in the Igbo-speaking south-east, because these were strong characteristics of the pre-colonial ethnic groups living in these regions. But no evidence that I have found suggests this is the case. Indeed, Olivier de Sardan’s (2009) work in Niger appears to contradict it. The conclusions drawn by Olivier de Sardan’s work on contemporary state function in Niger, a country with a sizeable, traditionally hierarchical Hausa population, and my own research in south-eastern Nigeria, with its traditionally democratic, equalitarian Igbo population, are very similar. This would suggest that pre-colonial patterns of rule have largely been obliterated, because otherwise we would expect to see differences persist in the contemporary era.

Chabal and Daloz seek to circumvent the issue of heterogeneity by outlining the similarities between Nigerian pre-colonial systems, particularly in the lack of differentiation of state from society. As I outlined earlier in this chapter, this is an attractive argument, but the lack of differentiation of state from society in different polities does not disguise the fundamental differences between them, such as the deferential culture of the Hausa versus the equalitarian ethos of the Igbo and the widely differing patterns of patron-client relations. States were not differentiated from societies, but they still operated in fundamentally different ways. This would indicate that, were

states 'appropriated' by local custom and tradition, as Chabal and Daloz suggest, they would begin to work as their pre-colonial forebears did. But, as noted above, this has not happened, and there is now significant similarity between methods of "real" governance – the "manner in which public services are really delivered" (Olivier de Sardan, 2008: 4) – in post-colonial West Africa. This suggests clearly that the one unifying factor is the colonial period, thus fundamentally refuting Chabal and Daloz's argument for retraditionalization.

### *Ethnicity*

One of the most important features of colonial rule is the impact it had on relations within and between Nigeria's many ethnic groups. This occurred through a number of colonial practices including the separation of Nigeria into first two and then three zones and the different policies employed in each of these three. In addition, the British favoured ethnic groups who employed particular types of governance, which had an impact on patterns of ethnic identification (Mustapha, 2000). British attitudes in Nigeria were based on belief in ethnic difference and this was reflected in policy. Sir Hugh Clifford, then Governor of Nigeria, argued in 1920 that Nigeria's "self-contained and mutually independent Native States [are] separated from one another ... by great distances, by differences of history and traditions, and by ethnological, racial, tribal, political, social and religious barriers" (cited in Coleman, 1965: 194). Clifford's speech revealed much about British attitudes to ethnicity in Nigeria. The most important is his belief that Nigeria's ethnic groups were wholly separate and self-contained entities, something which the evidence does not bear out (Ranger, 1983). The policies to maintain this state were indirect rule, or reliance on indigenous rulers, and regionalisation (Nnoli 1978; Okolie, 2003). The differences between ethnicities were also intensified by the education system, which sought to cultivate a "love of tribe" (Coleman, 1965: 50), and the suppression of nonethnic or religious identities (Okolie, 2003). Nnoli (1978: 113) points out that indirect rule reinforced communal identity among Nigerians, created a new sense of communal identity where none existed, and provided "a new symbolic and ethnocentric focus for the urban population", while Mustapha (2004: 5) argues that the linguistic and political fragmentation that characterised pre-colonial Nigeria was intensified by British action, which, though both happenstance and deliberate policy, "wove cleavages into the very heart of the Nigerian state".

A number of commentators have argued that the Hausa-Fulani (Thompson, 2000), Yoruba (Thompson, 2000; Ekeh, 1975; Peel, 1983) and Igbo (Thompson, 2000; Isichei, 1976; Ekeh, 1975) ethnic groups only came into existence as a result of colonialism. Thompson (2000: 66) suggests that "groups which had previously sought only loose affiliation now came together as 'tribes'". The same author (2000: 67) further argues that in the case of the Yoruba, the emergence of a common language resulted from 'standard' Yoruba becoming the medium of western education. Nnoli (1978) suggests that ethnic coalescence took place because the British manipulated communal variation, making sectoral difference the basis for identity. This had a revolutionary impact: "[i]ndividuals began to relate to one another on the basis of the prediction, expectations, and definitions of the situation informed by the internalised myth of intercommunal differences". Joseph (1987: 47) focuses his argument much later in the colonial period, arguing that broad ethnicities emerged as a result of modern electoral

politics. Alongside this Joseph emphasizes the importance of the competition for material goods that accompanied independence as a driving force behind the 'ethnicizing' of Nigeria society (ibid, 49). What these arguments suggest is that ethnicity in Nigeria is adaptable and open to changes in circumstances rather than fixed and primordial. Indeed, this adaptability continued until the very end of the colonial period, when two Igbo clans in Delta State 'became' Urhobo (Lloyd, 1974: 248-249, cited in Igwara, 2001: 94-95). This also suggests that processes of ethnic coalescence and fragmentation continue in the contemporary era.

Mustapha (2004: 3) suggests that this process has taken place across Nigeria, arguing that there is a "tendency for ethnic segments to coalesce or differentiate in the face of economic or political developments". He offers the example of ethnic relations in present-day Taraba state, in north-eastern Nigeria, in the middle part of the twentieth century. Mustapha argues that the Jukun ethnic group were privileged by the colonial regime because they had been the first ethnic group in the area to meet the British and because they had a centralized state system, which the British believed was a superior type of government. The result was that neighbouring ethnic groups "assumed Jukun identity to varying degrees" in order to gain access to colonial privilege (Mustapha, 2000: 103). With the advent of electoral politics in the 1950s, these groups "rediscovered" their "true" identities. Mustapha (2004: 3) also suggests that some ethnic groups who were previously known under an "umbrella" identity have "fragment[ed] into their composite identities as a result of political and administrative developments". These examples suggest clearly that ethnicity is not a static concept, but one that can adapt to prevailing circumstances, particularly political and economic opportunities. Orji (2008, 51-52) concludes that "contemporary ethnicity in Nigeria is a recent social construction which did not exist in its present form in the pre-colonial period".

However, Oyovbaire (1983: 8) observed that "as a social system, colonialism did not destroy completely the pre-colonial social relations of production, distribution and exchange and of patterns of authority and culture". He suggests that some of the patterns of rule unique to particular groups endured. This is an argument in favour of production of contemporary Nigeria that is syncretist, in that it emphasises the enduring legacy of pre-colonial modes while acknowledging the changes that have accompanied colonialism. I would argue that the impact of these changes was greater amongst democratic groups such as the Igbo and Ibibio because their pre-existing social systems were all but wiped out, whereas among, for instance, the Hausa, both the system of rule – centralised, hierarchical polities – and the personnel – the Emirs – remained.

Chabal and Daloz (2006) go further, arguing that notions of ethnicities "created" by European colonialists are "very debatable". They suggest that those arguing for this approach base their analysis on "the assumption that the pre-colonial area that is today Nigeria was harmoniously homogenous, and that it was the British who exploited and fostered whatever divisions may have existed between the groups who chanced to live there". They suggest that in fact postcolonial politicians exacerbated ethnic divisions in order to mobilise support. However, the work of Nnoli and Mustapha clearly argues that the division of Nigeria into clearly demarcated ethnic groups and the acute 'ethnicization' of Nigerian society were a result of colonialism. Postcolonial politicians

were able to exploit ethnic identity, but only because these identities had been created during the colonial period.

#### *Colonial Nigeria: analysis*

What the foregoing discussion suggests is that colonialism had a fundamental impact on methods of governance in Nigeria. It is also possible to argue that the colonial era had a particularly severe impact in the Igbo-speaking part of the country, because its pre-colonial system of rule was judged inferior by the colonisers and, consequently, replaced with a system that lacked local legitimacy. In terms of governance, the colonial period was a critical rupture and ushered in a period in which the state was viewed as illegitimate and working for it was viewed as an opportunity to get rich but that didn't carry with it responsibilities to those one was working for. By the time Nigeria achieved independence in 1960, the roots of maladministration were firmly in place. This situation formed the basis of Nigeria's contemporary neopatrimonial state.

In terms of ethnic relations, colonialism appears to have exacerbated already-existing animosities between ethnic groups and made ethnic conflict the defining feature of Nigerian public life, a trend that has continued to this day. Contemporary pan-ethnic groups were also forged in the colonial era and the processes of change that many ethnic groups went through – coalescing around umbrella groupings or fragmenting further depending on circumstance – illustrates the functional and opportunistic nature of ethnicity in Nigeria, and refutes the argument made by the British that Nigeria's ethnic groups were static and self-contained. The 'ethnicization' of Nigerian politics owes its intensity and character to the colonial period.

#### ***Postcolonial Nigeria***

There can be little doubt that the colonial period formed the greatest single rupture in the history of the land that is now Nigeria. However, a number of issues related to Nigeria's postcolonial experience, including the role of oil as a structural factor in political economy, the impact of structural adjustment and the role of military rulers have had a significant impact on contemporary Nigerian politics and society. In an examination of the position of the Igbo ethnic group in postcolonial Nigeria, analysis of the circumstances and impact of the 1967-70 Biafra war are necessary. The aim of this section is to link these issues directly to the patterns of behaviour operating in the contemporary Nigerian state, particularly in its interface bureaucracies.

Oil was first discovered off Nigeria's coast in the 1950s (Kaiser, 2005: 28), but Nigeria's oil boom really began in 1973 with the first oil price hike induced by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). As a result Nigeria's terms of trade were multiplied three-fold between 1973 and 1981 (Canagarajah and Thomas, 2001: 146-147). The huge increases in oil revenues in the early 1970s created a scramble for resources among different ethno-regional groups, increasing the already-existent pattern of prebendalism. Oil revenues were also chronically badly managed and, crucially for Nigeria's subsequent development, the "huge inflow of oil revenues were spent as if the exceptional oil price increases of the 1970s were permanent" (Canagarajah and Thomas, 2001: 147). The poor benefited little, if at all, from the vast expansion of oil revenues (Jamal and Weeks, 1988).

The biggest impact of oil revenues has been to transform Nigeria into a nation that derives a significant portion of its revenue from the rent of indigenous resources to external clients, known as a rentier state (Mustapha, 2002a). Most importantly for this study, Mustapha argues that a “rentier psychology has heightened the communal and clientelistic struggle for access to resources” (Mustapha, 2002a: 168). The strong dependence of the Nigerian economy on oil revenues contributed to undermining the country’s political stability, notably by raising intergroup competition over the division of the “national cake” (Guichaoua, 2005: 3). The country’s oil reserves have also contributed to corruption (Lewis, 1996) that has benefited a few wealthy Nigerians but contributed to the poverty of the remainder (Kaiser, 2005: 28). However, Nigeria’s oil boom did not last long. Towards the end of the 1970s a period of declining oil revenues had a significant impact on state and society and in the early 1980s Nigeria faced a period of profound socio-economic and political crisis (Jega, 2000). As a result, the country was forced to accept a structural adjustment programme (SAP) from the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

The largest effect of declining oil reserves and the austerity that accompanied adjustment was the growing inability of the state to provide for its citizens. The oil revenues of the 1970s had been squandered without benefiting most Nigerians (Honey, 1999) and the state began to lose legitimacy in the eyes of its people. Production declined and debt rose. President Babangida had introduced structural adjustment in an effort to halt economic stagnation and revive growth, but this failed to materialise. The worst hit were ordinary Nigerians, who had to endure massive reductions in social provisioning, increases in the cost of healthcare and education and rampant inflation (Jega, 2000). Apter (2005) comments that Nigerians described their diets at the time as 0-1-1, 1-0-1 or 0-0-1, referring to breakfast, lunch and dinner. Someone on a 0-0-1 diet could only afford to provide themselves and their family with one meal per day. Retrenchment and declines in real wages cut across public and private sectors (Lewis, 1996).

Structural adjustment brought with it many effects. Ibrahim (2000) argues that identity mobilisation increased significantly during this period, Jega (2000) suggesting that this occurred in the context of scarcity, which led people to rely more on identity-based groupings that they knew would continue to provide support. Jega (2000: 34) continues by arguing that the impact of SAP on Nigerians’ livelihoods transformed their multiple identities and “narrowed them into a single focus ... gravitating around the politics of identity”. ‘Ethnicization’, a process that began during colonialism, therefore intensified as a result of economic change. The increase in high-level corruption in Nigeria can also be traced to this period and its aftermath, particularly the military administrations overseen by Presidents Babangida (1985-1993) and Abacha (1993-1998) (Kraxberger, 2004; Mustapha, 2002a). Armed robbery and gang violence increased, as did a number of other activities that would suggest a decline in moral values: prostitution, child abuse and domestic violence (Ihonvbere, 1993). The scarcity induced by structural adjustment also increased pressure on resources and is partly to blame for the increasing aggression of Nigerians (James Okafor, interview, 23 August 2007). Petty corruption increased in the context of scarcity and crisis, with the poor forced to “devise several unorthodox and extralegal ways of survival”, including corruption (Ihonvbere, 1993: 148).

### *Higher education in postcolonial Nigeria*

A number of authors (Ihonvbere, 1993; Anugwom, 2002; Brennan et al, 2004; Jega, 1996; Olukoju, 2002) and respondents during my fieldwork have argued that the austerity that accompanied structural adjustment had a significant impact on Nigerian higher education. In the early 1980s a lecturer's salary was easily enough to live on, and enabled academic staff to take foreign holidays (James Okafor, interview, 23 August 2007), but Nigerian universities "collapsed as a result of the funding crisis" that arose from structural adjustment (Professor Arinze Okafor, interview, 26 September 2007) and there was an exodus of senior academics (Eribo, 1996). Academics' salaries declined significantly, Bangura (1994: 19) suggesting that, in dollar terms, the wages of an average-grade senior lecturer fell from \$23,500 in 1982 to \$3,000 in 1988, with similar reductions in such benefits as health services and subsidised house and car loans. Many lecturers who remained were forced to take on other opportunities for employment such as "private business concerns, consultancies, scheming for government appointments, scheming for contracts and farming" (Ihonvbere, 1993). Austerity also caused lecturers to engage in extra-legal practices that had been much less prevalent beforehand. This took place in the context of a face-off between the government and the main academic trade union, the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), which resulted in a series of strikes that had a disastrous impact on higher education in Nigeria (Anugwom, 2002).

The changes outlined here suggest that structural adjustment had a significant effect on behaviour in the contemporary Nigerian university system, which has endured in the contemporary era. The military era of Babangida and Abacha also had a detrimental impact on higher education, as government became increasingly involved in its management (Jega, 1995; Saint et al, 2003; Olukoju, 2002). In particular, the government imposed its "cronies" as Vice Chancellors in a number of Nigerian universities, while "appointments, promotions and discipline of staff [were] single-handedly dealt with by Vice Chancellors with no regard to due process" (Jega, 1995: 252). It can be argued that this also underpinned the increasing role of 'loyalty' as opposed to academic prowess in university appointments, which I discuss in greater detail in chapter five.

Discourses of decline are strong in Nigerian higher education, but it is possible to argue that visions of the 'glory days' are a sentimental vision of a non-existent past. Lebeau (2000) argues that researchers, both Nigerian and international, have tended to accept this "mystification of the past", but evidence on the issue is mixed. Since national independence in 1960, Nigerian higher education has been through significant change. It has expanded rapidly, from just three institutions at independence (Akpan, 1987) to a total of 153 (45 universities, 63 colleges of education and 45 polytechnics), the largest number in Africa, in 2004 (Teferra and Altbach, 2004: 25). Numbers of students enrolling has also climbed dramatically, increasing by 12% in the 1990s (Saint et al, 2003: 16). However, this expansion has not been accompanied by improvements in quality (Anugwom, 2002; Saint et al, 2003). In addition, van den Berghe argued in 1973 that academic positions were not decided on the basis of merit alone, but on considerations such as kinship, ethnicity, sex, patron-client relations, friendship and politics. This suggests that some of the characteristics of Nigerian higher education that are present in the contemporary era – and which the discourse of decline implicitly

suggests are new phenomena – have been around for longer than many people, both respondents in my fieldwork and authors (such as Anugwom, 2002; Eribo, 1996; Jega, 1995) suggest. Despite these arguments, however, evidence for decline in Nigerian higher education is strong. I discuss this issue in greater detail in chapters four and five.

### *The Igbo in postcolonial Nigeria*

One event dominates the postcolonial history of the Igbo people: the Biafra war that took place from 1967-70, in which the Igbos sought to secede from Nigeria. The war was precipitated by the events of 1965 and 1966, which saw rising ethnic and regional conflicts giving way to an Igbo-dominated bloodless coup in 1966. This provoked anger from northern Nigerians, who felt that they had lost political power, resulting in a much bloodier counter-coup a few months later (Kohli, 2004). Serious ethnic violence followed, and in May 1967 the independent state of Biafra was proclaimed, precipitating the civil war that followed. The civil war lasted for nearly three years and concluded with a decisive victory for Nigerian federal forces.

A number of commentators have suggested that, first, the Igbo in post-Biafra Nigeria are marginalised, and second, that the Biafra conflict has had a direct impact on this marginalisation, or at least on Igbo perceptions of marginalisation (Smith, 2006: 184; Mustapha, 2004; Orji, 2008). There is a belief amongst Igbos that the official post-war policy of ‘no victor, no vanquished’, designed to promote post-conflict reconciliation, was not applied (Ibrahim, 2000), while there is a perception among the Igbo elite that “Nigerians of all other ethnic group will probably achieve consensus on no other matter than their common resentment of the Igbo” (Nwankwo, 1985: 9). Alongside this, however, the war reinforced notions of Igbo solidarity and the sense that “they are, despite their differences, one people” (Smith, 2005: 31). Gugler (1991: 406) argues that the war increased people’s attachment to their place of origin, which was “the one place that provided succor in calamity”. It was therefore another period in Nigerian history that reinforced ethnicization and recourse to community solidarity.

However, it should be asserted that, while Igbos have found themselves marginalised in the field of national political leadership – there has not been an Igbo President since the civil war and Igbos were also underrepresented within the ruling military councils of the Babangida and Abacha eras (Mustapha, 2004) – this is far from the case in other arenas of Nigerian life, notably education and access to employment within Nigeria’s large civil service. In educational terms, Igbos have been very successful compared to most other Nigerian ethnic groups. In 2000, for instance, 39.4% of the total numbers of students admitted to Nigerian universities were from the Igbo-dominated south-east geopolitical zone, while just 4.7% originated from the north-west zone and 3.9% from the north-east, regions with comparable populations (Mustapha, 2004: 16). Igbos make up just 18% of Nigeria’s population (Central Intelligence Agency, 2009). In other areas such as employment in the federal civil service and bureaucracy Igbos are similarly well represented (Mustapha, 2004).

What this suggests is that the lack of Igbo representation at the highest levels of government has engendered a sense among the group that they are marginalised, though statistics suggest that, in other arenas, they are over- rather than underrepresented. During fieldwork I discussed this issue with an informant who suggested that, because Igbos are marginalised in politics, they must therefore be

marginalised in every sphere. When I showed him statistics pointing out that Igbos tend to be wealthier than, particularly, northern Nigerians, he suggested that the statistics were likely to be biased. Feelings of Igbo marginalisation were recounted to me by a number of other respondents during fieldwork. This suggests that perceptions of marginalisation among Igbos are likely to be stronger than the reality.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has sought to address two distinct issues: first, what are the influences on contemporary Nigerian – and particularly Igbo – state and society and how are they analysed by two distinct bodies of literature: those using the neopatrimonial state and micro-empirical approaches; and second, what are the historical antecedents of patterns of governance and ethnic identity that have been identified both by literature and my own empirical research.

Many of the criticisms I have made of the neopatrimonial approach in the context of Nigeria are similar to those made about the paradigm more generally, which I discussed in chapter one. The most important aspect to note is that Nigeria, while showing characteristics of neopatrimonialism such as patronage, clientelism and corruption, should not be defined solely by these characteristics. Detailed analysis reveals that, while the Nigerian state provides services inefficiently and partially, it does provide services. Characterisations of the state as a phantom or a façade, which only exist to assist those working within them, are therefore only partially correct: more detailed and nuanced analysis is necessary.

A further issue that is clearly of great importance in the Nigerian case is that of morality. It is clear that Nigeria is changing, with ‘selfish’ actions embodied in the practice of 419 gradually replacing more community-based patron-clientism. Morality in contemporary Nigeria is very difficult to understand fully because particular practices will be judged differently by different people based on a combination of factors. Perhaps the most important point is that modern Nigeria, and particularly its labyrinthine state, are so difficult to navigate that many people will do anything they can to succeed even if this means defrauding or deceiving the state, the students they teach or the colleagues they work alongside. The fact that Nigeria is “a war” (Smith, 2006: xii), in that individuals must fight to survive and to succeed, and its public sector so difficult to navigate, makes actions like these understandable and even logical responses.

My analysis of the historical antecedents of patterns of contemporary behaviour reveals that the era of colonialism was a critical rupture in Nigerian history. A number of practices common in contemporary Nigerian interface bureaucracy – such as the role of intermediaries and the lack of accountability of those in authority – appear to have no pre-colonial antecedents among Igbo communities and were introduced as a result of the bureaucratisation that took place during colonialism. Others, however – such as state appropriation and its legitimacy and material gain as an indicator of status – could be argued to bear some resemblance to pre-colonial behaviours. However, these practices have been through so many changes as a result of colonialism and post-colonial patterns of politics that they are now virtually unrecognisable from their original forms. The origins of these practices are therefore syncretic. In terms of ethnicity, the colonial era is clearly the origin of the intensity of contemporary ethnic antagonism in Nigeria, as I have argued in detail above. My analysis illustrates the fluid and



economically opportunistic nature of ethnic alignment, which clearly refutes notions of primordial, unchanging ethnicities that were forwarded by the British colonisers.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

### Introduction

The first two chapters of this thesis have analysed literature on states and societies in, respectively, Africa and Nigeria. This analysis serves two purposes: first, to enable understanding of the character of these institutions and their evolution; and second, to provide context for the second part of the thesis, my empirical analysis of the Nigerian higher education system. This chapter sets out the way in which I carried out this empirical work, focusing on the methodology I employed while in Nigeria and its development, the relationships I formed and their impact on the data gathered. I also discuss the process of data analysis and writing up. Its primary focus, however, is the nine months I spent in Nigeria and its impact on my overall conclusions.

Before I began my fieldwork, what I knew of social science PhDs was that there seemed to be a linear structure that people would follow – a year's literature review, a year's fieldwork and a year's writing up (Devine, 1999: 130). In the few months before I left for my fieldwork, this structure didn't make any sense to me. I was forever asking myself questions that I knew could only be answered by actually doing the fieldwork rather than writing a literature review that I presumed would need to change. Before going to USEN I knew that there was a high probability that my plans would be insufficient or even irrelevant, and that the only way to understand the path my research would take was to leave as soon as possible. Preparing detailed research plans felt like a pointless task when I knew that they would need to respond to what I found when I arrived. As it turned out, my supposition was largely correct: issues that I had never considered became central, while others I had expected to form the basis of my work instead faded into the background.

My fieldwork research methodology – an ethnographic approach that endeavours to respond to themes and issues brought up by participants and therefore entails having a broad and flexible overall research question – also developed during the period of fieldwork. In this, the fact that I was conducting my research in a university was both help and hindrance. Some colleagues used their theoretical academic knowledge to help me place what I saw into social and political context. Others, however, tried to guide my research design in ways that were not always helpful, particularly favouring the use of quantitative or positivist techniques. I decided not to follow this advice because these techniques tend to favour breadth over depth, and my goal was to produce 'thick' description. I was also reluctant to employ a positivist research stance because of its emphasis on the production of objective knowledge. All research, particularly that conducted with participants from a different social and cultural background, is inevitably biased by the researcher's beliefs and prejudices. As Geertz (1973: 15) argues, anthropology – which, though I do not describe myself as an anthropologist, provides some of the methodological impetus for this research – is "something made", "something fashioned", rather than 'objective truth'. Osoba (1996: 371-372) is even more explicit in his rejection of objectivity when he states that "[t]he proper distinction that can be made [in social science] is between scholars who explicitly state their prejudices and predilections and those who hide theirs behind the smokescreen of value-free and objective analysis". I place myself squarely on the side of those who choose to acknowledge and reflect on their own position and its effects rather than trying to suppress it in the name of an unattainable and unwanted "scientific

method". Coming from this perspective, using positivist techniques would have been inappropriate and ineffective.

The fieldwork process was one of ongoing change and development: of the themes, the research question, data collection and recording techniques, the influence of personal relationships on fieldwork, and ethical issues. This chapter endeavours to set out the processes and discoveries that underlie the development of my research and its methodology and how and why it changed, before, during and after fieldwork. Most importantly, it outlines the need for flexibility and openness to the directions research participants take, lest one produces research that is more about the imposition of the researcher than the views of the participants. Having said this, it is equally important not to simply accept the views of respondents as transparent, un-value-laden and representing the truth.

It is also incumbent upon me to acknowledge my desire to present Nigeria and the Nigerian state in a non-normative light; to seek to understand its society without recourse to the condemnatory perspective and terminology found so commonly elsewhere in literature on African states (see for instance Bayart et al, 1999; Chabal and Daloz, 1999; Chabal, 2002). It is necessary to approach study of the country with an open mind and to have a duty of care to one's informants and the research site more generally. This chapter is split into five sections, examining, respectively, the development of methodology; development of the research; development of relationships; data analysis and writing up; and research ethics.

## **Developing methodology**

### ***Finding a research site***

Dr Onwuchekwa then suggested ... that the best way to gain the sort of access I needed was to be 'inside' an organisation I wanted to examine ... I said that I could not get 'inside' a health facility because I am not a doctor or nurse, but that I can lecture, so therefore it might be a possibility to get 'inside' at USEN. Dr Onwuchekwa then suggested I apply for a position as a Research Fellow. I thought about this for a while, and concluded that if the possibility was there I would be crazy to turn it down (field notes, 11 October 2006).

I had lived and worked as a university lecturer in the Igbo-speaking part of south-eastern Nigeria for an academic year in 2000-1 and had always intended to return to the region for my fieldwork, primarily because I had a head start in terms of knowledge of local norms and the way society works. When I returned to set up my fieldwork in September 2006 I knew that I wanted to examine a distinct arena within the Nigerian public sector. I was influenced by the PhD research of Daniel Jordan Smith, an anthropologist who had also done his fieldwork in Igboland<sup>12</sup> whilst working as a paid member of staff at the health programme he was researching. As a result Smith had been able, in addition to 'official' interviewing and conducting a household survey, to gain "access to informal conversations that took place at the margins of formal project activities" (Smith, 2003: 705). This type of approach – using the formal to gain access

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<sup>12</sup>For the purposes of this thesis this term refers to the predominantly Igbo states of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo but not the smaller areas of other states, most notably Delta and Rivers, with significant Igbo populations.

to the informal – seemed to be an effective way to see the hidden activities of an organisation through the development of trust with respondents.

This notion of being inside an organization, of carrying out research while simultaneously being an ‘ordinary’ member of staff, appealed to me greatly. I hoped to be viewed as ‘Chris the lecturer’ or ‘Chris my colleague’ rather than ‘Chris the white man asking difficult questions’. ‘Insider’ research can be highly rewarding, and also allows the researcher to provide some recompense to the organization that has to put up with his or her presence. Scheper-Hughes (1993: 18) outlines a similar situation in *Death Without Weeping*, in which she returns to the place where she had previously worked as a nurse, but this time as an anthropologist:

Why had I refused to work with them when they had been willing to work with me? Didn't I care about them personally any more, their lives, their suffering, their struggle? ... The women gave me an ultimatum: the next time I came back to the Alto I would have to “be” with them—“accompany them” was the expression they used—in their *luta* [struggle], and not just “sit idly by” taking field-notes. “What is this anthropology anyway to us?” they taunted.

I would not seek to compare my situation to the one described here, but I did wish to become integrated into the lives of my future colleagues – to do more than “sit idly by taking field notes” – and become a member of staff alongside my role as a researcher. Getting a position as a Visiting Research Fellow, and stating openly that I wanted to lecture, provided an excellent opportunity to do this.

Once I had arrived in Nigeria, and through meeting a number of influential people reasonably quickly, I resolved many practical issues such as where to live and what courses I would be assigned to teach within a few days of arrival. I was therefore free to explore my research themes reasonably quickly. In this early part of fieldwork I had perceived that my methodology was innovative because it did not seek to impose meanings on my respondents but rather allowed them, within the broad boundaries of my interest, to guide me towards those issues that were of most importance to them. It sought, within some broad limits, to follow the maxim that “ethnographers end up studying whatever their hosts want to talk about” (Metcalf, 2002: 32). As noted above, however, this was perceived as rather strange by many of my colleagues, as employing a flexible research methodology appeared to illustrate unpreparedness and confusion rather than adaptability and openness to change. In part this reflects the low status of anthropology in comparison to quantitative approaches in Nigeria (Ezeh, 2006).

### **Language**

The language of Nigerian universities, as with government, commerce and other official business, is English. Nonetheless, USEN is a predominantly Igbo institution, with, in 2005-6, over 87% of students having one of the five ‘core’ Igbo states of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo as their state of origin (University of South Eastern Nigeria, 2006), in addition to smaller numbers of people who would describe

themselves as Igbo with a different state, usually Delta or Rivers, as their state of origin.<sup>13</sup> Amongst academic staff the proportion of Igbos is even greater (ibid).

Prior to leaving for Nigeria I took a short Igbo course, though this did not provide me with much more than greetings and short sentences. In the event I did not feel that my lack of understanding of Igbo was a disadvantage, as almost everyone in Igboland, and certainly at USEN, speaks English fluently. However, there were times when people would have conversations, in my presence, in Igbo. Sometimes this was simply because it was their mother tongue, but on other occasions I felt that people used Igbo in order to prevent me from understanding what they were saying. Olivier de Sardan (2009: 53) argues that in Francophone African bureaucracies, there are two separate “semantic universes”, one French, used in “official and public circumstances”, the other in the local language, involving “everyday expressions of derision, familiarity, complicity, and competition”. This situation, in which English is replaced for French, provides a useful summary of the situation at USEN, at least among Igbo staff members. However, had I spoken and understood Igbo fluently, I assume that the conversations in Igbo would not have taken place at all if they were supposed to be secret. It is for this reason that I do not believe my lack of language skills was a disadvantage.

It is, however, important to acknowledge that my experience in Nigeria might have been different had I spoken Igbo fluently. Davies (1999: 77) notes the way that learning the language of one’s informants can engender rapport and can provide a reason to interact. It is possible that learning Igbo would have encouraged my respondents to see me as ‘one of them’ more than otherwise, which could have had a positive effect on data collection. Conversely, the university is not a uniformly Igbo institution and speaking Igbo often could have had the effect of alienating non-Igbo informants. In hindsight, I realise that learning Igbo would have changed my ethnographic experience, but it is impossible to say whether it would have enabled me to acquire better data.

### ***Speaking in whose voice?***

Ethnographic research is inevitably an amalgam of different voices or, as Geertz (1973: 9) puts it, “our own constructions of other people’s constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to”. In anthropology the usual way of expressing the different perspectives of researcher and researched is through using the expressions *emic*, referring to “local cultural reality, whether it is conscious or unconscious to the people in question” and *etic*, “the analytical language of comparison that anthropologists use to describe and make sense of the central aspects of this reality” (Eriksen, 2004: 57). Eriksen (2004: 58) goes on to outline the challenge of combining *emic* and *etic*:

On the one hand, how far can one’s descriptions depart from the native’s point of view before one is making things up; and on the other hand, how close to the local reality can one pitch one’s descriptions before one merely reproduces the world as locally perceived, without adding anything that might contribute to a theoretical understanding of culture and society?

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<sup>13</sup> State of origin in Nigeria broadly determines one’s ethnicity – if you ask a Nigerian where they ‘come from’, they will tell you the state that they consider to be their ancestral home, rather than the place where they may have lived for most or all of their life or even where their family has lived for generations.

In my case the research site altered the emic/etic relationship significantly, because I was able to draw on the perspectives of local academics, some from the discipline of anthropology. These perspectives are neither truly emic, because they link local reality to a broader theoretical and conceptual understanding, nor truly etic, because they encapsulate the knowledge of the researched, not the researcher. Instead, they are 'insider' accounts (emic) filtered through different theoretical frameworks (etic), depending on the discipline of the academic. This made the university a particularly interesting place to carry out research. One respondent in particular, an anthropologist, acted as a bridge between local, insider accounts of how the university functioned and analytical understandings of these themes. Despite the fact that I frequently disagreed with this anthropologist's interpretations, these discussions were still very useful ways to link theory and practice. In addition, as someone with prior experience in the Nigerian higher education sector and working as a lecturer, I could also be viewed as having some form of insider perspective.

Academics at USEN provided their own analyses on a variety of different topics ranging from the reasons underlying Nigerian and African underdevelopment to the motivations for academics to buy Mercedes cars or embezzle money from the university. These analyses came from a variety of different perspectives – including an orthodox neo-Marxist perspective that Nigerian underdevelopment is caused by western imperialism and a viewpoint on extra-legal behaviour that was continuist, in that it stressed that corrupt and patronage-led behaviours are endogenous and reflect patterns of behaviour in pre-colonial Igbo society – and illustrate the diversity of opinion at USEN. I treated each with a note of caution, particularly as many accounts appeared ideologically-driven, but they undoubtedly provided richness to my understanding. The incorporation of local perspectives also helps to offset criticism that the research has a neo-colonialist aspect of observing 'native' behaviour and attaching externally-generated meaning to it. Mkandawire (2003: 481) argues against this type of research, in which outsider researchers interpret other cultures with little knowledge, suggesting that "local scholars who have to grapple with the complexities of the relationship between current events, and their histories and cultures, are often horrified by the interpretative audacity displayed by their itinerant colleagues".

### ***Data collection techniques***

Within my overall ethnographic methodology I employed a variety of techniques to collect data, the most important being interviewing, which took a variety of forms. I also used observation (both participant and non-participant), focus groups, a questionnaire, informal conversations and collection of artefacts such as university reports, meeting minutes, campaign material used in university elections, transcripts of public speeches, statistics and exam papers.

Many of my interview and focus group respondents were students who were struggling financially. In these cases I would often give the respondent a small amount – ₦100 or 200<sup>14</sup> (approximately 40-80p) – as a token of my gratitude and to meet any transport costs, which would easily be covered by such an amount. In Igboland it is considered impolite to invite someone to one's home and not provide refreshments, so

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<sup>14</sup> For the duration of my fieldwork the exchange rate between the pound and the Naira was approximately £1:₦250.

whenever I conducted an interview or focus group at home I would always ensure there were enough snacks and soft drinks to go around. This seemed to be well appreciated and was often met with the typical Nigerian English phrase 'you are trying'.

My decision to reward some respondents financially was motivated, first, by a desire to compensate informants for their time and assistance (Ellen 1984: 138), following an ethos of reciprocity: my respondents were giving me their time and knowledge and I felt duty-bound to offer something in return. This feeling of duty was intensified by my knowledge of the huge financial disparity between some of my respondents and me. Second, I also wished to stay within the bounds of local norms in which it would be considered impolite for me not to offer some recompense to student informants but inappropriate for me to offer the same to staff members. I was also eager not to highlight the huge difference in financial status between myself and my respondents by giving ostentatiously, as Ellen (1984: 109-110) comments:

Gift-giving, as a means of creating and cementing relationships with informants, is only of benefit if it is done with discretion. If overindulged or gone about in the wrong way, its effects may simply serve to emphasise the social and material differences between fieldworker and informant.

### *Interviews*

In all I conducted fifty-four interviews, with a tremendous variety of locations and interview, recording and transcription styles, usually involving only one interviewee but sometimes more. The location of the interview depended on my relationship with the interviewee and their status. Interviews with senior members of staff invariably took place in their offices as I did not wish to inconvenience them while interviews with more junior staff or students took place either at the small flat the university provided me with or, later, the office I was given. All of the interviews I conducted could be described as semi-structured, in that I had an idea of either the questions I wanted to ask or, more usually, the themes I wanted to explore, but I tried to be flexible and follow interesting stories or digressions. Many Nigerians make important points through the telling of long stories so it was important to allow a story to be told fully in case there was a hidden meaning. This approach can be likened to Malinowski's (1922) notion of foreshadowed problems, in which the general focus of the project is known but does not restrict the observations that can be made. The questions I asked and themes I followed tended to emerge from previous interviews and observations.

A significant proportion of my research involved examination of extra-legal practice and I felt that certain influential members of staff in my department, perhaps unsurprisingly, prevented me from seeing the area where decisions on these sensitive issues took place. The most important reason for this was the understandable desire among many members of staff that they should not share information on extra-legal activities with an outsider researcher. When I posed questions to senior members of staff in my department about the ways in which students access the university, for instance, I was invariably advised to speak to those people who were in charge of such matters, even though any member of academic staff would have a good idea of how the system operates. Often I would be granted an interview with the member of staff dealing with the issue, in which I would be provided with information related to the policy in place and would invariably be assured that this policy was being rigidly adhered to. In my

interview with a senior member of staff in the admissions department, for instance, my interview notes record that “it felt very much like I was being given a sanitised version of events, the ‘party line’” (Nonso Okadigbo, interview notes, 4 April 2007). Likewise in my interview with another senior member of staff in the university administration, I commented that “I realised that [he] was going to tell me the party line. He was not going to admit anything that contradicts the university’s official policy” (Prof. Uzochi Eze, interview notes, 16 March 2007). These responses were not in the least surprising to me – indeed, I would have been extremely surprised if these people had expressed different views – but they illustrate the fact that staff I knew personally – potential gatekeepers to the ‘backstage’ arena – were ushering me in the direction of those they knew would provide ‘frontstage’, ‘party line’ responses.

The notions of frontstage and backstage arenas where people behave differently were originally conceived by sociologist Erving Goffman. Goffman (1990 [1959]) suggests that the different types of behaviour visible in the frontstage and backstage areas are directly related to the presence of audience, and in my research I endeavoured – sometimes successfully, sometimes not – to cease to be viewed as an audience member, but instead as someone trusted to view the backstage. It is in this arena that “the suppressed facts” are revealed (Goffman 1990 [1959]: 114) and where one therefore gains access to information that is more meaningful than that expressed in frontstage encounters. Peltó and Peltó (1978: 248) comment that the success of an ethnographer can be judged according to whether he or she gains this kind of access. It is, however, important to note that, even once trusting relationships have been formed with informants, one cannot be sure that what we are hearing is truly the ‘backstage’ arena, or whether we are still being treated to accounts that have more to do with saving face or political expediency than transferring knowledge to the researcher.

I used a variety of techniques to record interviews. In the early part of fieldwork the vast majority of interviews were note-taken, primarily because I felt that establishing trust with participants was necessary before tape recording. Later on, and particularly towards the end of fieldwork, I used a tape recorder much more, primarily because I knew that once I had left USEN I would not be able to collect any more data and wanted to get as much first-hand information as possible. Also, by this stage I felt much more comfortable asking colleagues and students if I could record their words.

#### *Personal conversations*

I collected data through many personal conversations with staff and students at USEN, mainly with respondents I had come to know well. Often they would start as general conversations and if we began talking on a topic of interest to my research I would take out my notepad and ask if the speaker objected to me taking notes. Sometimes I would not take notes during a chat with an informant and return to my computer immediately and type what I could remember. Information acquired through personal conversations was some of the richest of my research. These conversations were invariably very relaxed and were often accompanied by food or a beer. On a few occasions informants would sleep the night in my flat after an evening of discussion.

In all situations informed consent was requested and granted. With my best respondents I would ask if it were possible for me to use anything they said to me for



my research, whether during that conversation or at any other time, thus removing the necessity to ask for consent each time we spoke.

### *Focus groups*

Focus groups were probably the least successful of my data collection techniques, and I only carried out two, though I had intended to do many more. I felt there were two reasons underlying the lack of success of my focus groups. First, many of the students did not know me particularly well, so may not have felt at ease. Indeed, it was noticeable that I got more useful responses from the focus group where I knew the students better. Second, the group situation appeared to engender some competition between students in terms of who could make themselves look the best, each seeking to emphasise the altruistic nature of their decisions and highlight the positive aspects of themselves, their university and society, important aspects of 'frontstage' performance (Miller, 2004: 222). I also felt some defensiveness among students with regard to USEN and Nigeria generally. They painted a picture of Nigeria that differed significantly from my experience and the views of other respondents. Indeed, while the use of different data collection techniques is designed to confirm what has been found elsewhere, I got the opposite impression about my focus groups: "my feeling is that what I have learnt in observation, for instance, is actually likely to be contradicted rather than confirmed by focus groups" (field notes, 19 July 2007). This feeling was shared by Daniel Jordan Smith, with whom I discussed methodology during my fieldwork. Smith remarked that in his experience focus groups "don't give you anything about real behaviour" (Daniel Jordan Smith, personal conversation, 11 July 2007) because people would be unlikely to reveal their secrets in front of others.

I did not continue focus groups for a number of reasons. The most important was that I felt I got richer data from one-to-one interviews with people I knew well. In addition, focus groups were extremely difficult to set up, with participants consistently cancelling or trying to alter the time of the group. At USEN I found organising anything in advance difficult, as my field notes attest:

One aspect of carrying out research here that is very difficult is the fact that it is difficult to organise meetings. When I arrange something, it is quite often cancelled without me being informed. People turn up late as a matter of course, whether they are important or not. It seems to be the culture here to either 'come now' – as in, I telephone someone and they ask 'where are you?' and then come to where I am immediately or nothing. Actually organising for someone to come to a particular place at a particular time is practically impossible. This makes collecting data both difficult and frustrating (field notes, 14 June 2007).

As a result of these difficulties, I felt that my time would be better spent collecting data in different ways.

Focus groups were the only data collection methodology I used that required research assistance, and I employed a postgraduate student who was already a friend to take notes of the groups. This was because I felt that I wanted to concentrate on running the group, but was concerned that transcribing the tape recording would be difficult due to the propensity of people – including myself – to talk over one another, and the difficulties I sometimes had with understanding exactly what people had said. Employing a research assistant turned out to be rather unsuccessful, as he did not take

notes on the sessions particularly well, so I was forced to rely on my transcription anyway.

### *Observation*

Observation formed a major part of my fieldwork. I felt that I was carrying out research constantly, from the moment I left my flat in the morning until the time I went to sleep. It seemed as though my whole life was concerned with observing USEN, collecting data or writing up field notes or interviews. I lived on USEN campus for my whole trip and often days and even weeks would pass without me leaving the confines of the campus or a small market area situated nearby where I would go to buy food, use the internet and eat and drink, either alone or with friends. I therefore had ample opportunities to view the visible, non-hidden aspects of campus and those living, working and studying there.

Ethnographic observation can be split into two types – Brewer (2000: 60) terms these “participant observation”, which entails acquiring a new role, and “observant participation”, which involves utilising an existing role – but in this research it is difficult to make a clear distinction between the two. I was a contracted member of staff and, though both students and staff knew that I was also a researcher, I felt as though most people – and certainly those who I had not asked to become involved in my research – viewed my primary role as that of lecturing. I was therefore, aside from when I was interviewing people or running focus groups, always a ‘participant’ because I was always viewed as ‘Chris the lecturer’. However, at the beginning of fieldwork my role as an *active* participant in departmental life was frustratingly small, as this quotation from my field notes reveals: “outside of lectures, which cannot tell me very much, [exam invigilation] is the only area in which I can actually participate in the life of the university. I have not been invited to one thing by my department – no meetings, no nothing” (field notes, 28 March 2007).

Many USEN staff minimised my observation of backstage arenas, particularly during the early part of my fieldwork, but there were still areas in which I was able to view the ordinary functioning of the university. These included attending lectures, seminars, discussion groups, conferences, departmental and faculty board meetings, and invigilating exams. The majority of these events did not shed much light on the issue I was researching, but did provide interesting and useful background material. However, there were two particular events that I attended, both as an active participant, which enabled me to see a side of the university that I had not previously seen, and that appeared to represent ‘ordinary’ campus life, unaltered by my presence. These two events were invigilating one particular exam – in all I invigilated ten exams (eight internal and two screening exams) during my time at USEN – and attending a departmental board meeting.

Attending these two events and discussing them with colleagues and students afterwards allowed me to gain an understanding of some of the processes at work in the university in a way that would have been impossible through second-hand information such as interviews. The departmental board meeting in particular was something of an epiphany for me in that I immediately perceived and understood things that had previously not made sense to me and which I had largely failed to notice. Likewise exam invigilation alerted me to issues such as exam malpractice and, more

particularly, the unlawful sale of materials as a requirement of passing a particular course. I had known that practices like these took place in the university, but experiencing them first-hand was useful triangulation to second-hand accounts of such practice. It was through these experiences that I was able to understand some of the dynamics that I had either not noticed or not recognised as important. Observation also legitimised further questioning on sensitive topics, in that I could, for instance, preface questions ‘as I saw in the board meeting ...’. This could potentially forestall responses such as ‘how do you know that?’ to sensitive questions and I felt that it afforded me a protection of sorts.

### *Questionnaire*

I conducted one questionnaire (appendix 1) very early in my fieldwork, which was administered to students in the public administration department in an effort to gain an insight into the socio-economic backgrounds of students as part of an initial investigation of inequality. The main finding of the questionnaire – which, despite not actually arising from students’ answers, was interesting in itself – was that occupation, which in the UK would be used to understand a person’s socio-economic status (Haralambos and Holborn, 2008: 33) is a poor guide to it in Nigeria. A good example is the use of the word ‘businessman/woman’ or ‘trader’, which many students used to describe a parent’s occupation. These definitions could refer to occupations with vastly different economic status and rewards: a trader could equally be someone hawking household items for minimal financial reward or running a business employing large numbers of people and generating huge profits. Uchendu (1965: 92) confirms the bluntness of this tool when he comments that “[t]he occupational model, a very useful one in Western societies, hides more than it reveals when applied to Igbo society”.

The questionnaire was returned to me by only a small proportion of the students it was given to and the data it provided lacked depth. The time taken to put together the questionnaire, administer it and transcribe responses was time I could have spent much more productively on other activities.

### ***Presenting research to others***

Living and working in a university meant that I would meet many people – through chance encounters on campus, in internet cafés, in restaurants, at the university’s Academics’ Club – without the benefit of being formally introduced by a mutual friend or acquaintance. This meant that I had to decide how to present myself and my research to each person. I was often reluctant to mention even the fact that I was carrying out research, at least at the very beginning, instead describing myself as a lecturer. This was technically correct – I was giving lectures – so I felt justified in describing myself thus. I would usually elaborate on my research role more during conversation. The reasons for this were largely personal, but of course had an impact on my research. I wanted lecturing staff to see me as ‘one of them’ and for non-academic staff and students to be respectful. In this way, describing myself as a lecturer could be viewed as a bid for status in an environment where I felt like an outsider.

I found it difficult to describe my research to people I did not know well, and struggled to find an expression that would simultaneously convey something about my research while neither being too specific nor stating openly that I was interested in extra-legal practice. I did this for two reasons: first, because I perceived that, were I to emphasise

corruption and other extra-legal practices as the objective of my research, I could be perceived as someone whose main desire was to denigrate Nigeria. Harrison (2006: 16) comments that much anti-corruption discourse “reflects the disciplining agendas of northern powers” and I had no desire to be part of this discourse. Instead my approach is one of observation and analysis as opposed to normative judgment. Second, I believed that, even if extra-legal practices such as patronage and corruption occupy an ambivalent place in Nigerian society, I was certain that people would perceive that I was against them (whatever the truth of this), and that they would therefore be unwilling to discuss them with me. In part this perception is a result of the type of discourse Harrison mentions and the centrality of an inflexible pejorative terminology in anti-corruption practice. As a result, in the very early part of my fieldwork, in both conversations and interviews, I did not mention patronage or corruption and instead described my work as being based on access to the university. Harrison (2006: 23) comments that the position of corruption in discourse “may mean couching research not in terms of corruption at all, but in terms of bureaucratic encounters more generally: how people experience and respond to state representatives, in which ‘corruption’ may emerge as one aspect”. I endeavoured to adopt this type of approach.

Due to the acute sensitivities of conducting research on an issue that is usually perceived as unlawful or illegitimate, I was careful to present my research in a way that elicited a positive response from whoever I was speaking to. This meant I had to devise forms of words to describe my research that would simultaneously interest the listener and not arouse their suspicion that I was doing anything wrong or asking questions the interviewee perceived that I shouldn’t have been asking. Use of open-ended interviews allowed me to structure interviews around other topics – such as how prospective students gain access to USEN – and allow informants to spontaneously make links with topics such as patronage and corruption, a strategy also followed by Blundo and Olivier de Sardan (2006). Techniques such as this are necessary for a number of reasons, as Blundo and Olivier de Sardan (2006: 18) point out:

[T]he phenomenon of corrupt practices does not lend itself well to the participant observation method, given that it involves behaviours that actors tend to keep secret and entails risks associated with the disclosure of ‘sensitive’ information, ranging from retaliation of a criminal or social nature, to which the researcher’s informants may be subjected, to the blocking of access to the field of study.

As a result of these considerations, the phraseology I used to describe my work during the first meeting I had with different people evolved considerably during the research process, becoming progressively less specific. Examples include “access to higher education in Nigeria, using a case study of USEN” (field notes, 3 February 2007) and “an examination of the relationship between western bureaucratic norms and traditional social norms” (Chigozie Emerenini, interview notes, 23 March 2007). By the end of my time at USEN I would describe my research to people I had not previously met as simply “how the university works” (field notes, 20 September 2007). Importantly, I was always careful to establish some form of trust before stating anything about my interest in patronage or corruption. Having said this, I never used these terms except with my most trusted respondents, and even then they were largely unused, there being a sizeable vocabulary around the issue that rendered western academic phrases such as these obsolete: ‘connection’; ‘sorting’; ‘lobbying’; ‘backyard runs’. The process of

becoming vaguer in the initial descriptions of my research to new respondents was the opposite of Hammersley and Atkinson's (1995: 206) suggestion that "[e]thnographic research should have a characteristic 'funnel' structure, being progressively focussed over its course". It was a product of my increasing awareness of the sensitivities of my research, my desire to allow respondents to take the lead in discussions and my realisation that I did not have to be completely candid in order to be 'ethical', an issue I discuss in more detail below. Increasing ambiguity to new respondents took place in parallel with greater focus on particular issues – the "funnel" – with more trusted informants.

### ***Dealing with ambiguity***

When carrying out research on a sensitive topic such as this, it is inevitable that different respondents tell different stories, or different parts of the same story. There will invariably be things that certain people do not want a researcher, especially an outsider such as me, to see or understand; sometimes, therefore, respondents will deliberately withhold information or prevent access to certain arenas where decision-making takes place. Conversely, there will be others who are passionate about telling the story as they see it, the hidden conversations and negotiations that the outsider normally does not get to see. The role of the researcher is to mediate "between different constructions of reality to increase understanding of these various constructions and the social world behind them" (Davies, 1999: 213-214).

During my research there was a clear distinction between those who told me the 'official' story – the one that the university administration would want told – and those who sought to explain the more complicated interactions that take place behind closed doors, in the 'backstage'. There were, of course, many people who existed somewhere between these two extremes, people who would give me the official line on some issues and their version of others. The willingness of academic staff to tell me the unofficial version of events was dependent on two issues: the respondent's participation in such activities and their closeness to the university administration. Those people who I felt were not active participants in extra-legal practice and were not close to the university administration were also the most likely to be my best respondents. Unsurprisingly, nobody ever said to me 'yes, I will sell grades for money and this how it is done'; accounts of such practice were inevitably second-hand. Nonetheless, I built up a large-enough body of data to be able to make reasoned judgements on the veracity of different responses. Among students there was similar variation, though in this case it resulted from fear: many students were understandably concerned that if senior staff found out what they had said it could have detrimental implications for them. Conversely, some students were happy to discuss any issue I raised, whether the issue was perceived as socially acceptable or not. The difference between these two groups of students lies in the level of trust I was able to establish with them.

Only a very small minority of the interviews I conducted at USEN were what could be described as 'formal', in that they were with individuals with whom I had little or no personal relationship and took place in a formal setting, usually their offices. These interviews were note-taken rather than recorded, and often the responses I received were rather cursory. Most of these people, though not all, answered my questions by reciting the written policy on the subject, rather than actual events, because it was in

their best interests and that of the university to do so. As noted above, my area of research is very sensitive and to pursue these matters further, or even to suggest that there may have been things that were being kept from me, would not have been in my best interests, and could have had negative implications for my future research. These 'frontstage' accounts make up only a very small proportion of my data.

Throughout my research I have sought to privilege the views and experiences of Nigerians rather than seeking to impose my own beliefs upon them. During fieldwork I therefore emphasised the validity of my respondents' experience, without questioning this validity. Scott (1991: 777) provides a robust critique of this approach, arguing that when experience is privileged unthinkingly "the vision of the individual subject (the person who had the experience or the historian who recounts it) becomes the bedrock of evidence on which explanation is built. Questions about the constructed nature of experience, about how subjects are constituted as different in the first place, about how one's vision is structured – about language (or discourse) and history – are left aside." Scott argues that it is necessary to understand the position of the individual whose experience is being considered and that the experience itself is a product of this position. I have endeavoured to achieve this in my research in two related ways. First, I have privileged the experiences of Nigerians over my own, because Nigerians will inevitably have greater knowledge of the situation I am seeking to understand. That does not mean that I accept everything said to me at face value. Second, I have treated the viewpoints of different respondents differently precisely because of their experience. I acknowledge that, for instance, the views of an undergraduate student and a senior academic will inevitably be informed by different experiences and must be examined in the context of these experiences. What is important is the fact that everything I was told during my time in Nigeria is open to contestation, because each is simply one person's viewpoint at a particular point in time.

### **Developing research**

When I arrived for my fieldwork I had a broad plan, but one that incorporated an element of flexibility. I had identified a broad focus – patronage – and three concepts of interest – identity, acceptance and inequality – to structure my thinking within the broad focus. Other than this, however, I expected to follow themes identified by participants rather than seeking to impose these themes upon them. This does not mean that I intended my research to be entirely led by participants, but that I wanted to examine the issue in the broadest terms possible to avoid excluding potentially interesting avenues of inquiry. Of my three concepts of interest, I did not investigate the issue of inequality in detail because it was not mentioned by my respondents as being of importance to them, an issue I address below. The issue of acceptance became an integral part of the research, though I chose to use the term legitimacy. Identity – an examination of the relationships through which patronage takes place – is also a key concept in the research.

Inequality is an example of an issue that I had perceived would be important but soon dropped as a topic of interest as it was not discussed by my respondents. I had initially sought to examine whether patronage contributed to inequality in access to Nigerian higher education. However, through conversations with a variety of different people at the beginning of fieldwork it became apparent that socio-economic inequality was not an issue that people raised, either in formal data collection or informal conversations.

At no point did any of my respondents, for instance, bemoan the lack of educational opportunities afforded to the Nigerian poor or show feeling towards those excluded from education as a result of an inability to pay fees or buy other necessities required to participate in education. It could be argued that the emphasis on achieving individual success over campaigning for change in the African state is due to the small chance of success, as Young (1994: 291) has argued: “changing a rule through voice is all but impossible; securing an exemption through favour or payment is daily bread”. Likewise Chabal and Daloz (2006) argue that the common response to situations of injustice in Nigeria is not to seek to change the system, but to pay the person who can deliver the service required.

A further reason why inequality might not have been mentioned often by my respondents is the fact that, as an elite institution, USEN is unlikely to have many students from lower socio-economic backgrounds and simply studying at USEN is viewed as success. For those who have come from privileged backgrounds and/or have succeeded to gain entry to an elite institution, socio-economic inequality in access to higher education is unlikely to be of personal importance. What this also illustrates is the broader fact that solidarity in Nigeria is much more likely to be vertical – towards kin, community or ethnicity – than horizontal – towards those occupying approximately similar socio-economic positions in society. Within USEN there was some horizontal solidarity but it tended to be between those at the top of the university hierarchy.

My research community of people who had succeeded in gaining a place at a prestigious university is therefore not representative of Nigerian society as a whole, and feelings about inequality or injustice might have been very different among other strata of Nigerian society such as street hawkers or commercial motorcycle riders. I attempted to address this issue early in my fieldwork by broadening the research to include those had been excluded from education, but this proved to be very challenging and the potential avenues for research too numerous, so I decided to continue with my original plan. I should also acknowledge that many of my respondents – though by no means all – were in positions of leadership at USEN, and very few were women. By choosing these paths I acknowledge that in some ways I replicate the inequality I originally sought to study.

### **Developing relationships**

Developing strong personal relationships was vital to my research and I firmly believe that one of the most important aspects of ethnography is being accepted and liked by the people one lives with and seeks to understand. If people dislike you they are not likely to share their innermost thoughts and feelings with you. I was aware of the fact that I needed to devote time and energy to establishing trusting relationships as part of the ethnographic process. It is also important to reflect on this process, as Okely (1996 [1975]: 28, cited in Davies, 1999: 8) has commented: “the specificity and individuality of the observer are ever present and must therefore be acknowledged, explored and put to creative use”.

I am – in the UK at least – an outgoing and talkative person, something I expected to stand me in good stead in Nigeria. However, at the beginning of fieldwork the difficulties of the environment and of making small talk made me retreat into myself, which was not conducive to establishing the sorts of relationships I wanted. Outside the

company of a few people, I found it difficult to relax and this caused me to shy away from personal encounters with people with whom I felt uncomfortable. As an ethnographer seeking to understand, as much as possible, the workings of an environment through personal interactions with those living there, this was not helpful. At the beginning of my time in Nigeria I would look forward to evenings which could be spent alone, and came to see my flat as a sort of haven from the stresses of the day. In part this reflects the difficulties of daily life in Nigeria, which Smith (2006: xii) describes by stating that “getting ready for each day in Nigeria is a bit like preparing for the tension of battle”.

Ethnography is a research methodology that relies on time spent in a particular environment and as time passed I met more people whose company I enjoyed and who I could call my friends. However, I still found it difficult spending time with people who I did not feel an affinity with and I was told I had a reputation as someone who was always rushing around and was rather distant. At this point in the fieldwork I was extremely concerned about how I was perceived by people at USEN and worried that my lack of personal connections to people would stop me from acquiring the sort of intimate knowledge necessary. In hindsight, my biggest failing was probably impatience, and a desire to ‘get some data’ rather than investing time in establishing relationships before broaching the topic of formally carrying out an interview or talking about my research. As I noted at the time, my own behaviour was preventing me from being immersed in the environment: “I must invest more time in getting to know people, as in many ways I am the epitome of the ‘outsider’ researcher that I thought my lecturing would prevent me from being” (field notes, 23 March 2007).

Much later in my stay a new issue came to the forefront of my thinking around relationships: factionalism. The public administration department at USEN is heavily factionalised, with every member bar one belonging to one of two broad groupings. I was naturally drawn to members of one of these groups – without realising, at the time, that they were members of anything – because we seemed to share an interest in talking about Nigerian politics and I felt these people welcomed me and were happy I was working at USEN. I was invited to a discussion group, which, I later realised, was an important meeting place for members of this group. Having attended this discussion group a few times and become friendly with some of its members, I realised that I was becoming associated with the group. Without having fully understood the importance of factions in my department, all of a sudden I was a member of one. I did not feel this was conducive to my research, as I did not want to alienate any potential respondents, so I sought to disassociate myself from the group, such as by reducing the time I spent with members of the group in public:

I said I would come back to help invigilate Nnanna Umunna’s exam later. Wilson said that he had asked Ejiofor, Iwu and a PG [postgraduate] student to help. ‘Our gang’ I said jokingly. But as I write this, I have decided that it is not really in my interests to help. Helping Wilson is one thing, but helping this whole group is likely to mark me as a member of that camp, which, in the long-run, is definitely not in my interests (field notes, 23 September 2007).

My lack of interest in, and knowledge of, factionalism at the beginning of my stay in Nigeria is the result of two main factors. First, I had worked for some time in a Nigerian



university before and had not witnessed a split in my previous department. Second, empirical literature on patronage in Nigeria (such as Smith, 2001, 2003, 2005, 2006) tends to concentrate on the relationships between individuals and not on the formation of groups and doesn't discuss the concept of factionalism. Literature on the African neopatrimonial state, which is central to this research, is notably silent on the subject of factions, with the exception of Bayart (1991, 2009) who, while stating that factions operate in different arenas in Africa, nonetheless focuses his gaze at the highest levels of politics.

### ***Relationships of trust***

During nine months at USEN I was able to establish trusting relationships with a large number of individuals, both students and staff. However, some of these relationships were stronger than others, and three were particularly strong, being characterised by mutual trust and complete candour as to my research objectives on my part. I could rely on these respondents not to reveal to anyone else the questions I had asked and they, in turn, could trust me not to share the answers they had given with anyone else. There are a number of characteristics shared by these three people. First, they are all male. Second, they are all what I would describe as 'academics', in that they were interested in the discipline they taught and were committed to providing their students with a good learning experience, in contrast with a number of lecturers at USEN who could be described as non- or even anti-intellectual. Third, none of these three men could be described as being particularly powerful or influential in the university and were rather bitter about their experiences as a result, a characteristic of committed staff noted by Olivier de Sardan (2009). They are all, to a greater or lesser degree, and with varying degrees of volition on their part, outsiders, in that they were not close to influential people, nor were they particularly influential themselves. In this way I, the outsider, gained my most useful data from people who were themselves outsiders. Despite surface similarities, however, these three respondents had different viewpoints on a variety of issues, including the acceptability of assisting friends and kin to enter the university and their own positions within the university. They frequently contradicted one another, as many of my other respondents did.

These three men were all extremely helpful to my research, were my most important and useful informants and I would happily describe all three as good friends. I spent a large amount of time with one respondent, Chizoba Ndukwe. We would visit each others' flats to eat, drink together at USEN's Academics' Club and often travel together to Owerri, the nearest large city. I also attended Chizoba's grandmother's funeral. The time I spent with Chizoba was vital in gaining an understanding of his views and experiences and I have no doubt that our friendship had a positive effect on my research.

Friendship was an important aspect of my research. It was the most important factor in my ability to get beyond the 'frontstage' responses I had encountered at the beginning of fieldwork, as those with whom I established trusting relationships were more likely to share knowledge and experience that might not otherwise have been shared with an outsider. However, it is particularly important that the closeness of my relationships with these people did not cause me to privilege their understandings over those of others, something I have sought to achieve throughout my research. Davies (1999: 82) points out that privileging friendship may "produce very bad ethnography if it

degenerates into a highly individualised and particularistic account". In my research I draw on the experiences and viewpoints of a variety of different individuals. Some people, such as the three men noted above, inevitably have a greater role than others, mainly because I spent the greatest amount of time with them. However, I have endeavoured to form a picture of the university that draws on the viewpoints of as many of my respondents as possible.

### ***Relationships of suspicion***

I struggled to establish good relationships with members of the select club, an influential faction, though I had a good relationship with a senior academic who was closely allied to the group. I chose not to discuss my research with this group and did not ask any of them, with one exception, for interviews. Given the sensitive nature of my research, I felt it would be imprudent of me to ask too many questions of people I did not trust. I also felt, and others told me, that members of this group engaged in the sort of extra-legal activities that I was interested in and may not have wanted me to ask about them. Lastly, this group, or certainly some members of it, were extremely powerful within the university and commanded influence with other powerful people including the Vice Chancellor. Arousing their suspicion or outright hostility could have had negative implications for my research.

However, with ethnographic fieldwork, as Altork (2006, 96) comments, "every field situation is different and initial luck in meeting good informants, being in the right place at the right time and striking the right note in relationships may be just as important as skill in technique". My relationship with this group could have been very different had I socialised with them early in my stay at USEN. The major patron of this group had asked me if I drink alcohol, to which I replied yes, and he said I should accompany them when they next went out together. However, the invitation was never confirmed and I lacked the confidence and the desire – even at this early stage I did not feel welcomed by this group – to follow it up. It was only much later that I came to realise what a missed opportunity this had been.

Later in my research I became aware of a potential bias in my research as a result of mainly interviewing people who existed away from the main locus of power at USEN. Indeed, one of my closest informants commented that my research could potentially be damaged by only interviewing those who were "on the margins or hold grudges" (Chizoba Ndukwe, interview, 3 September 2007). I was aware of this problem and resolved to try and become friendly with select club members by going to their offices and 'greeting' them: a common Nigerian practice where one conveys respect to the person being greeted through exchanging pleasantries. However, while previous efforts to make myself known to staff members through greeting had been successful – I would invariably stay to chat – with select club members there was a mutual nervousness, possibly motivated by their knowledge that I was researching extra-legal practices in which they were involved. I resolved to try and meet with select club members in a more sociable environment, by visiting, with a friend, a bar I knew they frequented. My field notes record my motivations:

Perhaps it could be a good idea just to go down there for a drink, with Collins, to see if they are there. Even a short chat could serve to soften relations, and could provide a way in to their confidences, or at least provide enough friendliness to enable me to ask

for an interview. If I could chat with them after a few drinks, that could possibly be even more helpful (field notes, 2 September 2007).

However, the day after this resolution I heard from a different respondent that a senior member of the select club had commented to students that my presence in the university was “a problem” because I was “asking too many questions” (field notes, 3 September 2007). The member of staff in question was extremely close to the university administration and commanded great influence in both my department and the university. At this point I became concerned for my own safety and contemplated leaving USEN immediately. My field notes record my concern that I may have my computer stolen or even be physically attacked. In hindsight, these concerns were an overreaction, but when I discussed them with a friend he suggested that they had some justification. I decided to leave USEN for a week to stay with friends outside the town. However, I resolved not to conduct any further research with the select club for fear of antagonising them. This could be seen as a missed opportunity but at the time I felt that prioritising my own safety was the most sensible course of action.

### ***Developing relationships: summary***

Establishing trusting relationships is – during ethnographic fieldwork as at any other time – based on the personal connections one is able to establish with others. I lived in an environment in which it is extremely easy to offend – as I had discovered on numerous occasions during my first visit to Nigeria in 2000-1 – and establishing strong relationships with those you get on with and, just as importantly, reasonable, non-confrontational relationships with those you get on with less well, is incredibly important. Becoming as Igbo as possible – through eating local food (or, at times, pretending you do), drinking palm wine, greeting people often and with ostentatious ceremony, using Igbo words – is of enormous help. I felt that I was successful in adapting to local norms of behaviour and lost count of the number of times I would be described as ‘a Nigerian’, ‘one of us’, an ‘African chief’, an ‘African’. This level of ‘insiderness’ is obviously helpful to ethnographic research.

The concept of ‘greeting’ is instructive in this regard, as it is such an important part of local culture. It took me a while to learn just how important it is, but once I realised, I would spend a lot of time simply greeting people – going to lecturers’ offices for no other reason than to greet, to shake hands and chew the fat over the issues of the day. Invariably this would concern Nigerian politics and inevitably led to discussions about corruption, patronage and similar concepts, often related to the university or state sector. Greeting therefore became, for me, both a way of becoming friendlier with my colleagues and also carrying out data collection on the topics I was most interested in.

### **Data analysis and writing up**

The process of analysing data began very soon after my arrival in Nigeria. Having lived in Nigeria for a year in 2000-1 and having done substantial reading on Nigerian state and society prior to fieldwork, the early days and weeks at USEN were spent mentally comparing my expectations with what I saw and heard. Later in the fieldwork process I would re-read large chunks of data in an effort to ensure that I tailored subsequent data collection to emergent themes. This process enabled refining and clarification of the research question. Data collection and analysis were therefore not distinct periods in the research process, though the analysis that took place during fieldwork and after

served two distinct functions: analysis during fieldwork was intended to ensure that data was collected as comprehensively as possible and as many avenues as possible were explored, while post-fieldwork analysis performed the function of formulating the overall research arguments.

It is important to highlight the differences between analysis during and after fieldwork. Devine (1999: 130) argues that splitting fieldwork and analysis is problematic because “[i]t is almost as if the dialogue with the researched (so earnestly defended during ‘fieldwork’) is no longer viable and suitable for the solitary work of ‘writing up’”. I have sympathy with this argument, but, in my case, the differences in emotional attachment to the research site require acknowledgement. I found Nigeria a stressful place to live and work, and, understandably, this stress is no longer present during writing up in an office in Bath. The way data is interpreted must therefore necessarily be different, because the researcher is not subject to the same pressures as during fieldwork. I have also sought to retain the dialogue with the researched through discussions of aspects of my research with my respondents since I returned from the field.

I coded all my data using NVivo, which allowed me to simultaneously organise my data and re-familiarise myself with it. I formulated sets of analytic categories through which to code data, ranging from reasonably precise categories (‘patronage’, ‘higher education access’) to more abstract concepts (‘change’, ‘obligations’). These categories were devised and implemented by me and therefore represent the ethnographer-imposed as opposed to informants’ categories defined by Davies (1999). Of course this is not a value-free process, as what I coded as, for instance, corruption, might not be viewed as such by the actors in question. The codes I applied and the influence this had on subsequent analysis therefore reflect my own background and the biases this has engendered. Coding enabled me to isolate the different contributions made by informants and to organise my thoughts on a particular issue, which fed into my overall analysis. I used NVivo as a way of organising my data and my thoughts, though the identification of relationships between different nodes was achieved through extensive reflection on the data and the experience of acquiring it. Analysis of literature and discussion with others – informants, supervisors and colleagues – enabled me to hone my analysis further.

The process of writing has involved constant interplay between my data and other literature. In seeking to combine analysis of a particular micro-empirical arena with broader discussions about the nature of the Nigerian state, I have been through an iterative process of examination and re-examination of both my main argument and its relationship with other writing. Many of the arguments I make in the thesis have been arrived at through the process of writing itself, which has necessitated frequent returns to re-examine my data.

### **Research ethics**

Ethics are of course a crucial aspect of ethnographic research, particularly when the subject matter is as sensitive as mine. As with methodology more generally, my views on and handling of ethical issues developed during the course of the research. One of the most important issues, and one which I had some difficulty grappling with, was how candid to be about the central aims of the research. I had originally believed that in order to remain within ethical guidelines I had to be completely honest, to the point of

explaining in minute detail what I was seeking to achieve to respondents. However, through conversations both with friends in the field and my supervisors, I realised that there were ways of presenting my research that followed Brewer's (2000: 97) suggestion that "where complete candour is difficult, general statements which are not in themselves lies should be used". I sought to accomplish this in two distinct ways. First, I became more ambiguous when presenting my research. In this way I went through the anti-funnel process outlined above, whereby my explanations of what I was researching grew progressively more general, though that is not to say they became less accurate. Second, I became more subtle when asking questions, often 'playing dumb' in the process. I feigned ignorance about the existence of certain practices in order to put my respondents at ease, to engender in them a belief that I could not possibly be a danger if I knew so little. Therefore instead of asking, for instance, "how do personal connections influence access to USEN?" I would instead ask "why is it that some students appear to be much weaker than others? How do these students get into USEN?" In this way I was able to draw on my 'insider' experience as a lecturer, as this showed me the poor quality of some students. Once a level of trust had been established, greater candour was of course possible, but beginning with general statements allowed me to assess which people would be amenable to speaking to me, while simultaneously not revealing everything about my research to people who may not have been happy about my work.

It is important for my research to protect the anonymity of both my participants and the university. Before gaining the informed consent of participants that their words would be used in my study I would always explain that I would not reveal their names. Some were grateful for this and suggested that they would not have been so revealing had I not promised anonymity. Others said they would be happy for me to use their names, arguing that they had nothing to hide and would tell anyone their views. In this study I have gone to great lengths to protect the identities of those who spoke to me. In certain cases characteristics such as the ethnicity, state of origin, gender or academic department of respondents has been changed to protect their identity. However, it is also important to recognise that, even though I have sought to anonymise all respondents, it is possible that these people could be recognised by insiders. I acknowledge that there is therefore a tension between best ethical practice and the realities of conducting sensitive research in an environment such as a university.

Anonymising the university is also problematic. Early on in my research I was told that a particular senior member of staff would not want to see the university "dragged through the mud" (field notes, 5 March 2007). This statement was revealing in that it showed that the issues I am examining are seen as wrong in some way, and while they may be freely discussed among staff and students, many senior staff will not want outsiders to know what goes on. The statement also reveals that the primary issue may not be whether I found out about the existence of certain activities, but whether I, as a researcher, would publicise them beyond the university. As I have noted elsewhere in this thesis, I have used a false name for the university in order to protect its identity.

A further ethical issue is that of critical analysis of USEN. Scheper-Hughes (2006: 207) argues that "usual anthropological manners" dictate that the researcher describes "only what was 'good' and 'right' about a given society and culture". While I do not describe myself as an anthropologist, I still feel that strong criticism of an institution or society is

unhelpful in ethnographic fieldwork. This is problematic in my research, because many of the practices I document go against both the official rules of the university and Nigerian law. Were one to approach these issues normatively and compare behaviour to western-inspired norms of morality, it could be perceived that my research is critical of USEN and those working there. The important issue is the way in which the behaviours and practices I describe are integrated into an understanding of Nigerian, and particularly Igbo, culture and society, and that this context informs discussion. I have tried not to assess what I saw at USEN pejoratively but rather to present what I saw as neutrally as possible. If a reader, Nigerian or otherwise, wishes to judge the university or the country negatively as a result of my work, that is their choice, but I have endeavoured not to do so myself.

## **Conclusion**

The most important characteristic of the empirical aspect of this research – both methodology and the research question itself – is the way it developed during fieldwork in response to observations and discussions with respondents. I began my fieldwork with a broad but flexible plan and the intention to follow the research interests of my informants within this broad schema. As such, therefore, this research is my own, in that I have been its architect and have set its parameters, but it is also the outcome of close cooperation with informants. Two particular issues are of interest in this regard. First, the fact that my research was conducted in a university environment enabled me to bridge the sometimes difficult gap between theory and practice. A number of my informants are experts in their chosen field and their input helped me to place the processes and behaviours I saw into a more fruitful academic context. Second, the attribute of friendship cannot be overstated. It sustained me personally, allowed me insight into the everyday concerns of ordinary Nigerians and allowed me to better understand the important issues of the research. When conducting empirical research of this sensitivity, trust is of paramount importance, and friendship is key to achieving this trust. Only through establishing strong personal relationships and discussing important issues was I able to understand the dynamics of Nigerian society. I do not, however, intend to give the impression that establishing relationships in the field was easy or that I consider myself a good ethnographer because I was able to gain the trust of a few key informants. Rather, I seek to emphasise an important, unteachable aspect of ethnographic work: the way in which one responds to situations and chooses different options is dependent on the personality of the researcher. This is not something that can be altered through research training or formulating detailed research plans, yet it conditions the relationships we form and therefore the way we understand the context we are investigating. As such, the personality of the researcher cannot and should not be overlooked when seeking to understand the research process.

This research draws considerably on the experiences and perspectives of people who were marginalised within the university. It had not been my intention to speak to people based on their closeness to university power structures, but as fieldwork progressed it became apparent that those people I was closest to personally, and those who I considered my best respondents, were in some way, like me, outsiders. Partly this is a product of the sensitivity of my research and the desire of prominent people to maintain a particular picture of the university that is visible to outsiders. But it is also the product

of a natural affinity between people who feel marginalised and the desire to find others in the same position. Maybe, therefore, mutual outsidership was the motivation for some of my strongest relationships, which began during fieldwork and endured after its conclusion.

## **Chapter 4: Student Access and Success at the University of South Eastern Nigeria**

### **Introduction**

The first chapter of this thesis analysed a large body of literature pertaining to African states, while the second focused specifically on the case of Nigeria. Both chapters focused primarily on the corpus of literature describing these states as neopatrimonial and used other types of literature to critique this approach. The next two chapters will analyse the workings of a university in south-eastern Nigeria in an effort to assess the validity of some of the claims made by neopatrimonial state literature, in particular those claims referring to the operation of neopatrimonial states. Chapters four and five focus respectively on the careers of students and academic staff as they attempt to gain access to, and success within, the University of South Eastern Nigeria (USEN). Assessing these processes enables an understanding of the dynamics and discourses of authority, morality and power both within the university and in its relations with wider Nigerian society. It is worth pointing out at this stage that I am not suggesting that any of the practices I outline in chapters four and five are unique to Nigeria, or Africa, or the 'developing world'. Many of the practices recounted in these two chapters take place elsewhere in the world, both in the higher education sector and other arenas of the public realm.

The experiences of students as they attempt to enter USEN, and their careers once inside, are incredibly diverse. Academic ability and hard work have an influence on success and failure, but to these factors must be added the hugely important role played by integration within influential kin and social networks and the ability and willingness to use money to influence events. This chapter examines the interrelationships between official – merit-based – and extra-legal – non-merit-based – practices in influencing student attainment. Below I address the related issues of the motivations underlying formal and informal activities and their social legitimacy, in the university generally and among specific groups. It is possible to discern general patterns about the way these factors operate and the impact they have on the experience of Nigerian higher education for students.

Most neopatrimonial state literature is deficient in its examination of the ways in which official and extra-legal processes intersect. Much of the literature from this approach (such as Clapham, 1985; Chabal, 2002; Chabal and Daloz, 1999; Medard, 1982; Lewis, 1996) conceptualises neopatrimonial states as consisting of types of organisation in which patrimonial relationships pervade a political and administrative system that is formally constructed along rational-legal lines (Clapham, 1985). In short, the state is viewed as privatised because it works only for the particularistic advancement of those working for it and their client groups. Some neopatrimonial state scholars (notably Bratton and van de Walle, 1997) and scholars from other approaches (such as Therkildsen, 2005; Erdmann and Engel, 2007; Olivier de Sardan, 2009), by contrast, acknowledge the hybrid nature of contemporary African states and view the state as ambiguous and the product of constant tension between two sets of norms. However, the majority of these approaches also fail to adequately conceptualise the complexity of logics within African states, Olivier de Sardan being a notable exception. The neopatrimonial approach largely fails to appreciate the linkages between the imperatives of official, civic morality and unofficial, 'patrimonial' or kin-based morality,



primarily due to an assumption that behaviour is inevitably patrimonial in character. In fact at USEN these two logics are continually reforming and reconstituting one another and result in new, ambiguous sets of logics. Young (1981: 148) notes that this is the case in universities across Africa, where there is tension between the “values of higher education, universalism, national integration, developmentalism” and “the realities of its social processes”.

Within the literature on the roles of students in Nigerian higher education, there is emphasis on a few key issues, notably the influence of ethnicity and region on access to higher education (van den Berghe, 1973; Adeyemi, 2001; Akpan, 1987, 1989, 1990; Ukiwo, 2007) and the contemporary focus on the importance of acquiring a degree certificate over the skills that are supposed to be used to acquire it (Afigbo, 2004; Lebeau, 2000; Odo, 2002). There is also a good deal of technical literature emanating from international organisations on Nigerian higher education, but its emphasis on issues of policy and university management seem far removed from the day-to-day realities of campus life. Saint et al (2003: 277) formulate their argument as if the Nigerian higher education sector existed in a vacuum:

At this juncture, the main task is not to accelerate the pace of change but to institutionalize current reforms and operationalize them effectively. If progressive self-steering, self-regulating, and self-reliant universities are to emerge in Nigeria, greater flexibility and responsiveness is required.

These policy conclusions have little relationship with the higher education system as I saw it in Nigeria and suffer from a lack of grounding in the reality of everyday processes. This is a fault of a considerable amount of technical literature related to public service provision and higher education in Nigeria (such as Asein and Lawal, 2007; Adeyemi, 2001; Oni, 2000). It is difficult to imagine how useful conclusions such as “institutionalizing and operationalizing reforms” are, or indeed what they actually mean, when policy and reality have such a tangential relationship as they do in Nigeria.

From the discipline of anthropology, Smith (2001, 2003, 2005, 2006) provides short, anecdotal – in that they reflect on the efforts Smith’s in-laws and friends expended to get their daughter into a prestigious school – accounts of patronage in access to Nigerian education but they do not address larger issues, particularly the intersection of official and unofficial norms. Smith (2001: 359) acknowledges the intersection of different and competing sets of norms in the Nigerian public sector more generally and suggests that the public and private realms overlap and interpenetrate, later (2006: 13) going further and suggesting that these two realms are “experienced as one reality”. More generally, Smith’s body of recent work (2001, 2003, 2005, 2006) dominates contemporary non-normative discussions on Nigerian state-society relations. To my knowledge, however, there is no comprehensive study on access to and success in Nigerian higher education that links the issues of merit – access and success through ‘official’ channels – with other, extra-legal or semi-legal routes to success such as through ‘connection’, ‘lobbying’, Vice Chancellor’s list and staff quota, exam malpractice, ‘sorting’ courses and innumerable other processes. It is this gap in the literature that my research addresses.

My analysis suggests that both official and extra-legal processes are important but that the interrelationship between them is what is critical for an understanding of Nigerian

higher education. Each member of academic staff is subject to a combination of pressures brought to bear on them from colleagues inside the system – the pressure to uphold the good name of department, the faculty and the university as being ‘serious’ and concerned with academic rigour and meritocracy – that limit the ability of the individual to act according to other pressures, from inside and outside the system, from colleagues, kin, friends and co-religionists to circumvent official procedure. Students are forced to accept this situation, knowing that the attitudes of staff differ significantly and the attitudes of one staff member may also change depending on the student and the relationship between the two. Students can attempt to alter a situation that they are uncomfortable with – such as seeking to bribe (‘sort’) an ‘upright’ lecturer – and my research suggests that this may sometimes meet with success. However, there remains a high level of arbitrariness among staff, resulting in widespread uncertainty among students.

### **Accessing USEN for students**

Higher education is very important for Igbo people, both as a marker of social status – a family with no graduates is seen as shameful or a failure – and as a way into the congested job market. Being a graduate has tremendous social importance, such that poorer families may decide to scrimp on other things in order to send just one of their children to university. A degree is increasingly seen as a yardstick of success and this has caused even un-academically-inclined students to attend, or seek to attend, university. This phenomenon has caused the formation of “degree mills” in Nigeria that offer substandard degrees to desperate students, illustrating the lengths to which some students will go to secure a degree qualification (Okebukola, 2008).

Igbo people are more likely than most other Nigerian ethnic groups – the main exception being the minority ethnic groups of Edo and Delta states (Akpan, 1990; Adeyemi, 2001) – to apply and gain entrance to Nigerian universities. In 2000-1 39.4% of students admitted to Nigerian universities came from the Igbo-dominated south-east zone (Langer et al, 2007: 33), despite the fact that Igbos comprise just 18% of Nigeria’s population (Central Intelligence Agency, 2009). It is therefore unsurprising that universities in Igboland are heavily oversubscribed. At USEN, for instance, in 2006-7 35,000 students were examined for entry and only 6,000 admitted (Prof. Uzochi Eze, interview, 16 March 2007). The combination of oversubscription, clamour for degrees and the prestige of USEN produce some desperation among those seeking to gain admission. This desperation often leads students and, more particularly, parents, to use any means necessary to gain admission for themselves or their wards. Often this runs counter to official procedure, which emphasises high marks on a number of different examinations.

As in all higher education systems, demand for some courses is higher than others. In Nigeria demand tends to be high for courses that are likely to enable the student to gain high-paying and high-status employment post-graduation, such as law, medicine, pharmacy, computer science, accountancy and economics (Udobata, 2006: slide 4). This produces different minimum scores required to enter university to study a particular subject, which may be above what is known as university cut-off, the minimum score on the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) examination required for entry to USEN. At USEN, departmental cut-offs, particularly for high-demand courses such as those outlined above, may be much higher than the overall

university cut-off score of 200. A respondent of mine, for instance, applied for accountancy, scored 245 on JAMB and did not gain admission. Cut-offs for other, less sought-after courses are usually a lot lower.

I have divided my discussion on the way students enter USEN into two, the first examining the official procedure as enshrined in the policies of the government and the university. The second section examines the way in which students actually enter the university. I have structured my analysis in this way not in order to highlight deficiencies in actual practice compared to official procedure, but to illustrate the way in which two sets of norms reform and reconstitute one another. Official procedure is therefore viewed as an influence on actual behaviour rather than as a way of assessing the university normatively.

### ***Official procedure***

The official process of applying to and being accepted into Nigerian higher education is complex. National examinations for admittance to Nigerian higher education are run by JAMB, but in recent years many universities, including USEN, have begun to run their own admissions exams post-JAMB in response to concerns about irregularities in JAMB examinations. Officially, as of 2007, USEN accepts students on the basis of three criteria: merit, catchment area and Educationally Less Developed States (ELDS). At the time of my research Nigerian Federal Government guidelines for admissions were 45% merit, 35% catchment area and 20% ELDS (Asein and Lawal, 2007: 4). This had recently changed from 40% merit, 30% catchment area, 20% ELDS and 10% discretion (Saint et al, 2003: 268-269). It is important to recognise that, even though only 40% of places are reserved for 'merit', in fact merit has a role in all three application criteria: those students with the best JAMB scores from each catchment area or ELDS state will – according to official policy – be admitted. Saint et al's (2003: 269), assertion that "[o]nly 40% of students were admitted on the basis of their academic performance" is therefore a misunderstanding of the official process of applying to Nigerian universities. This illustrates one of the shortcomings of technical papers such as this, which tend to be based on superficial empirical research and make pronouncements without detailed knowledge of the actual functioning of the system. It would have been useful for me to see actual numbers of students admitted through each criterion in previous years, but a member of staff in the admissions department informed me that such figures were not available.<sup>15</sup>

### ***Merit***

Officially, to enter USEN on merit, students have to first score over 200 (out of a possible 400) on their JAMB exam combined with five o-levels on their West African Examinations Council (WAEC) or National Examinations Council (NECO) examinations. They are then eligible to sit the post-JAMB screening exam run by USEN. The top 45% of students are admitted. Prior to 2005 students would take the same exams with the exception of the internal post-JAMB exam. This exam was introduced as a response to increasing fears over the prevalence of malpractice in JAMB examinations and post-hoc manipulation of scores. A study carried out by a senior member of USEN staff (Udobata, 2006) revealed that fewer than 15% of students who scored highly (270 and

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<sup>15</sup> It is impossible for me to know whether these statistics are collected and I was not allowed access to them or they are not collected. I suspect the latter is the case.

above) on JAMB were able to score comparably (250 and above) on the internal screening exam. Post-JAMB screening has a significantly higher level of trust amongst staff and students at USEN. However, though USEN did not consider JAMB scores sufficiently trustworthy to assess admission, they nonetheless considered them useful enough to assess which students could then take the internal screening exam. The problems with JAMB have led some to suggest that the body should be scrapped altogether and that universities should be able to decide which students to accept themselves.

*Catchment area and Educationally Less Developed States (ELDS)*

Nigeria's 36 states and its federal higher education institutions are linked by the principle of catchment areas, in which preference in admission is given to students whose states of origin are within the university's catchment area. States within the USEN catchment area are the five south-eastern, predominantly Igbo states of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo and the six south-south states of Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo and Rivers, two of which, Delta and Rivers, have significant Igbo populations. The majority of people living in the south-south belong to Nigeria's minority ethnic groups. Catchment areas are based on geopolitical as opposed to purely geographical considerations. For instance, JAMB places Benue state, in the ethnically-diverse middle belt region, in the catchment area of the Universities of Jos and Ilorin, the Federal University of Technology, Minna and Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria (Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board, 2007). Some of these universities are considerably further from Benue state than many federal universities in south-eastern Nigeria including University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Federal University of Technology, Owerri and Nnamdi Azikiwe University and others in the south-south zone such as the Universities of Calabar, Port Harcourt and Uyo. The rationale behind this policy is to ensure that students from northern states that traditionally fare badly in examinations gain access to higher education by restricting some places in northern universities to candidates from these states (Adeyemi, 2001). Demand for university places amongst southern students is considerably higher than amongst their northern counterparts (Akpan, 1990).

Once students have been taken from the merit list of admissions, the university moves on to catchment area. The university will move down the list of students' scores, taking only those from catchment area states. If, for instance, pharmacy has to accept 33 students through catchment area, that makes three from each of the eleven catchment area states. The top three students from each of these states will therefore be admitted.

There are 22 states designated by the Federal Government as educationally less developed, of which nineteen are in the north of the country.<sup>16</sup> The ELDS principle works rather like that of affirmative action in the US and seeks to close the gap between the higher-performing south and lower-performing north of the country (Adeyemi, 2001). I was unable to ascertain the precise procedure for selecting students from ELDSs but presume it to be the same as for catchment area in that admissions

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<sup>16</sup> Educationally Less Developed States are Adamawa, Bauchi, Benue, Borno, Gombe, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Kebbi, Kogi, Kwara, Nasarawa, Niger, Plateau, Sokoto, Taraba, Yobe, and Zamfara in the north, Ebonyi in the south-east and Bayelsa, Cross River and Rivers in the south-south. There are no educationally less developed states in the south-west geopolitical zone.

officers move down the list of applicants and accept the first x number from each ELDS, dependent on the quota for each course. The concept of ELDS is problematic in southern Nigeria as so few northern students apply and are accepted to southern universities.

### *Discretion*

Discretion has historically been a criterion to select a proportion of the students admitted to USEN, even in official procedure, though, as noted above, this has recently changed. Discretion now makes up a semi-official form of entry to USEN, known and accepted by the university bureaucracy and only proscribed at the national policy level. Discretion – to be contrasted with students gaining entry through the extra-legal methods of ‘connection’ and ‘lobbying’ – takes one of two forms: Vice Chancellor’s list and staff quota, both of which are discussed at length in the section on semi-formal discretion below. A number of respondents informed me that 10% of places were still reserved for discretion and senior staff admitted that discretion is difficult to avoid, primarily because staff members believe that a place for their child to study at the university where they work is perk of the job (Smith, 2005). Discretion of this type undoubtedly still plays a part in decisions regarding access.

### **Actual process**

The criteria set out above illustrate the Federal Government’s policy regarding higher education access for students, a policy that a number of my respondents in official capacities insisted is rigidly adhered to. However, the reality is quite different. Students enter the university through a variety of means, invariably involving one or a combination of three factors: merit, personal connections (‘connection’) and money (‘lobbying’). These three assets can be conceptualised as “currencies” (Bierschenk, 2008) that are used by students as they seek to gain entry to USEN (and success once inside) and which may be used in different proportions depending on the situation. A number of important issues must be borne in mind when attempting to understand the processes through which students apply and are accepted to USEN. First, the process is highly competitive and the prize of gaining entry is generally considered to be of greater importance than the methods used. Second, when students gain entry to USEN, they are often unaware of the precise method through which they were admitted. Students are generally aware of whether they were admitted through merit list or ‘second’ or supplementary list (which, in theory, should contain students admitted through catchment area and ELDS), but none could tell me that they came in through catchment area or ELDS. This reveals the opacity of the applications process.

### *Merit*

As noted above, university policy recommends that 45% of students enter the university solely on the basis of merit, as reflected in their JAMB (pre-2005) or post-JAMB screening (post-2005) exams. Knowing the actual number of students admitted on the basis of merit is problematic for a number of reasons. First, as noted above, the university does not keep records of the numbers of students admitted through each method, or, less likely, these records are kept but I was not permitted access to them. USEN annual statistics do not record these figures. Second, those students who score highly on entry examinations are not always the most meritorious students, as there are significant problems with malpractice, impersonation and post-hoc result manipulation in exams to enter Nigerian higher education, particularly JAMB.

One conclusion related to merit emerged very strongly from my research at USEN: if your score on JAMB is not high enough, you will not gain entry. This was relayed to me by numerous respondents, though there were two people who suggested otherwise. One respondent, a student, told me that the children of “some Commissioners or some Ministers” would be able to use connections to gain entry even if their scores were below 200 (Chinedu Obuaya, interview, 1 March 2007) while another student said gaining entry with a sub-200 score “would be hard” (Emmanuel Adeniyi, interview, 17 April 2007). This suggests that particularly well-connected people – such as Commissioners and Ministers – may be able to find a way in for their children if they scored below university cut-off. But people in this position are highly unlikely to allow their wards to apply to USEN with such a low score; they are far more likely to pay someone else to sit the exam or change the grade afterwards to ensure that when they apply they have the score required for whichever course they hope to gain entry to. Aside from exceptional cases, therefore, the ‘no 200, no entry’ rule holds firm. As one respondent told me, the situation is “get to the bridge, and I will help you cross it” (Collins Ogunna, interview, 1 May 2007). What this means is that extra-legal – connection, lobbying – and semi-formal – VC’s list, staff quota – methods of admission are available, but only to those who have first ‘brought something’ – they have achieved what is required in terms of exam score. This suggests a system that is not solely patrimonial; one in which official policy – merit – may be manipulated, but still has a role. This therefore illustrates that the approach of many neopatrimonial state scholars – that the state is wholly privatised – is incorrect in the case of access to Nigerian higher education, and the argument suggesting a hybrid system carries much greater weight.

#### *Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) exams*

At USEN, both students and staff view JAMB as largely discredited and results of JAMB exams are not seen as a reliable indicator of student ability. There are a number of ‘sharp practices’ – a local term for extra-legal processes – through which JAMB scores are bolstered. The first of these is exam malpractice. This is the term used in Nigeria to refer to a variety of different methods of cheating in exams but particularly use of ‘microchips’ (pieces of paper with answers written on, folded many times), collusion with invigilators and impersonation. Collusion with invigilators may manifest itself through invigilators helping students answer questions, allowing them to take textbooks into the exam hall or providing model answers. Links between students and staff that facilitate collusion may be financial or based on personal connections or both. Many well-to-do parents pay professional exam-takers, known as contractors or mercenaries, to impersonate their wards in exams such as JAMB. At the time I was in Nigeria the town that hosted USEN had been banned from holding JAMB exams because of “massive cheating” (Prof. Chibueze Okoro, interview, 26 February 2007) during the previous round of exams.

The second type of sharp practice involves artificially inflating JAMB scores after the exam. This occurs through a variety of methods, including lobbying JAMB staff, for instance by visiting their head office in Abuja, using a connection within JAMB or the USEN admissions department or hacking into the JAMB website. One respondent told me that JAMB has a reputation for “students paying for whatever score they wanted” (Prof. Uzochi Eze, interview, 16 March 2007).

Opinions differ as to the proportion of students taking JAMB who benefit in some way from fraud or malpractice. One senior member of staff estimated that 20-30% of students benefitted in some way. However, Professor Valentine Udobata's (2006) research on numbers of students with high scores on JAMB who went on to replicate these scores on post-JAMB screening reveal that numbers of students who benefit from 'sharp practices' may be much higher.

#### *USEN post-JAMB screening exam*

In order to assuage fears relating to JAMB, most Nigerian universities have begun to run their own exams following JAMB. Since 2005, USEN has been one of these universities. I invigilated two screening exams for students applying to enter USEN for the 2007-8 academic year. In comparison to internal exams – of which I invigilated many – post-JAMB screening exams were extremely well-run with a high degree of commitment on the part of invigilators to prevent malpractice. There have been some problems with the screening exam, such as students making their own version of the USEN printout with inflated scores, but despite this there is a general belief among both students and staff that the screening exam has increased the numbers of students admitted to the university on merit as opposed to through extra-legal methods.

#### *Catchment area and ELDS*

Once the first, 'merit' list has been released, extra-legal practices begin to have a significant impact. This, combined with the fact that statistics on the numbers of students actually admitted through each method are unavailable, leads me to conclude that official entry policies on catchment area or ELDS are not strictly adhered to. An interesting case study is Israel Ezech. Israel, a student from Ebonyi, an ELDS, scored highly enough on his JAMB exam to be admitted to study for post-JAMB screening and scored well enough to be considered for his chosen subject, psychology, even without his ELDS status. But Israel was not admitted despite the fact that he knew he had a sufficiently high score. After having failed to secure admission Israel went to see the only person he knew who may have been able to help, a lecturer from his community who worked at USEN. There was no connection between Israel and the lecturer except that they were from the same community. The lecturer was able to speak to the VC on Israel's behalf and his admission was secured. There can be little doubt that, had the rules governing ELDS been adhered to, Israel would have secured admission without requiring the intervention of the lecturer. Israel's problem gaining admission could not be put down to ethnicity, as he was from Ebonyi, the only Igbo ELDS. This illustrates the fact that narrower identities such as community and kin are more likely to have an impact over entry than broader, pan-Igbo identity.

It is common for Igbo students and staff at USEN to apportion some of the blame for the poor quality of some university entrants to the 'quota system' of ELDS and catchment area (see also Smith, 2005). There is a perception that these policies are anti-meritocratic and benefit poorer-quality students from the south-south and, particularly, northern regions. It is possible that there is some truth in this, as it is certainly the case that, in particular, northern students tend to fare worse in education than south-easterners. It is likely that the anti-'quota' discourse at USEN is a combination of individual complaints seeking to find justification for the failure of, for instance, a friend or relative's application to USEN, and part of an ethnically-based narrative that puts blame for numerous ills upon those from the north of Nigeria (Smith,

2005). Indeed, Adeyemi (2001: 310) comments that JAMB itself is seen by many southerners as a northern creation designed to assist northerners to catch up educationally. However, the numbers of northern students attending USEN is a tiny and falling proportion of the total (see table 1). In addition it has been argued by Young (1981: 160) that universalism in access to African higher education may be “an expedient ideology of the privileged” designed to maintain that privilege. In terms of access to university, and particularly USEN, Igbos could certainly be regarded as privileged.

Table 1: Zone of origin of undergraduate students, USEN (%)

	South-East <sup>17</sup>	South-South <sup>18</sup>	South-West <sup>19</sup>	North <sup>20</sup>	Others <sup>21</sup>
2000-1	85.0	9.2	1.3	4.1	0.4
2001-2	85.9	8.4	1.5	4.0	0.2
2002-3	85.9	9.6	0.9	3.5	0.2
2003-4	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data
2004-5	86.1	10.3	0.8	2.8	0.1
2005-6	87.1	9.8	0.8	2.2	0.1

Source: University of South Eastern Nigeria, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2005, 2006.

As this table illustrates, USEN is slowly becoming a south-eastern, Igbo institution and the proportion of students from northern and south-western states is falling. The proportion of students from the south-south geopolitical zone has remained constant, possibly reflecting, at least in part, the proportion of students from this region who are of Igbo ethnicity.

Table 2: Percentage of total student numbers at USEN from Educationally Less Developed States

	Ebonyi	Bayelsa	Cross River	Rivers	All northern ELDSs <sup>22</sup>	Total ELDS
2000-1	2.3	0.5	0.7	1.4	4.1	9.0
2001-2	2.6	0.6	0.6	1.2	4.0	9.0
2002-3	2.7	0.7	0.8	1.6	3.5	9.3
2003-4	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data
2004-5	2.8	0.7	0.8	2.0	2.8	9.1
2005-6	3.1	0.5	0.8	1.4	2.2	8.0

Source: University of South Eastern Nigeria, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2005, 2006.

In general, the number of students gaining access to USEN from ELDSs is comparatively small, certainly significantly smaller than the 20% recommendation in every year for which I have statistics. In addition, given the paucity of data on avenues

<sup>17</sup> Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo.

<sup>18</sup> Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Rivers.

<sup>19</sup> Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, Oyo.

<sup>20</sup> Adamawa, Bauchi, Benue, Borno, Gombe, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Kogi, Kwara, Nasarawa, Niger, Plateau, Sokoto, Taraba, Yobe, Zamfara, Federal Capital Territory.

<sup>21</sup> Non-Nigerians.

<sup>22</sup> Adamawa, Bauchi, Benue, Borno, Gombe, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Kebbi, Kogi, Kwara, Nasarawa, Niger, Plateau, Sokoto, Taraba, Yobe, Zamfara.



of entrance of USEN students, it is impossible to accurately state what proportion of these students entered the university through merit, catchment area (USEN is within the catchment area of Bayelsa, Cross River, Ebonyi and Rivers) or actually through ELDS. The most striking piece of information revealed by the tables is that Igbo students are gaining in admissions at the expense of their northern counterparts, whose numbers had almost halved in five years. It is not clear whether the reason behind the balance of students shifting from the north to Igbo students is to do with falling northern applications and rising Igbo ones, or differences in students admitted. This is because figures for numbers of students applying to USEN are not available.

The significance of the alterations in student numbers lies in the university's status. Within Nigerian state universities – those institutions that are operated by one of the country's 36 states as opposed to the Federal Government – it would be expected that a large proportion would come from the state because, as one of my respondents asserted, "its goal is to offer places to indigenes<sup>23</sup> of the state" (James Okafor, interview, 26 April 2007; see also Adeyemi, 2001). Because the state funds its own university it is able to assist indigenes by offering them places. This is not part of official policy but is accepted by all. However, federal universities, of which USEN is one, are funded by the Federal Government and therefore exist in order to support all students rather than those of one area or ethnic group. The principle of catchment area dilutes this slightly – because it supports the ideal that students should attend a university close to their state of origin – but this makes up just 30% of the total. It appears, therefore, that the increasing proportion of Igbo students at USEN is little to do with official policy and more to do with informal practices that act to assist Igbo students and discourage non-Igbos, particularly northerners, from applying. This is an aspect of the increasingly ethnicised nature of Nigerian society.

### *Shopping*

The term 'shopping' refers to the entirely legal practice of students who have scored above the USEN cut-off of 200 but below the cut-off for their subject 'shopping' for other courses to apply for. During my fieldwork I noted very clearly that attending USEN as opposed to another university holds much more importance than the course studied. If a student applies to USEN to study, for instance, psychology and does not gain a high enough score to study it, the student is much more likely to seek to study, for instance, sociology, religion or political science at USEN than to go to another university to seek admission to study psychology. This increases the numbers of students going from department to department 'shopping' for places.

While shopping itself is legal, it is an area of admissions in which extra-legal methods also play a significant part. This is particularly due to the desperation to gain entry among students who shop. The majority of students I spoke to regarding admissions who had not come in through the first 'merit' list had used some form of extra-legal method to gain admission. A useful case study is Emeka Orji. Emeka applied to USEN to study economics as first choice and political science as second choice. He scored 245 on JAMB, a score easily high enough to pass the overall USEN cut-off but not high

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<sup>23</sup> The term indigene in Nigeria refers to "those who can trace their ethnic and genealogical roots back to the community of people who originally settled" in a particular place (Human Rights Watch, 2006: 1).

enough to gain entry to either of his two courses of choice. He then picked up a form that enabled him to apply for other courses that still had places available and, because he wanted to maximise his chances of admission, he took them to a native of his home community who was also a family friend and who worked in the university. The friend checked that Emeka had scored sufficiently highly on JAMB to warrant helping him – over 200 – which he had. The contact then went around the faculty to see which courses still had places available and was able to find Emeka a place to study religion. Emeka did not have any choice over which course he studied and was very happy to have been offered a place to study any subject within the Faculty of Social Sciences. For the help he received from his contact Emeka paid ₦70,000 (approximately £280), a significant amount of money for a relatively poor student like Emeka. Scott (1969) argues that this type of transaction – in which kinship or ethnicity is utilised but money still changes hands – is more likely than either ‘purely’ kin- or ethnicity-based or ‘purely’ financially-based corruption.

This method of admission – using the help of a relative, friend or member of one’s home community and paying them a sizeable amount while also needing to score over 200 on JAMB – illustrates the complexity of gaining admission, the number of different avenues some students must explore before gaining entry and the commercialised nature of some relationships based on kin and community.

#### *Semi-official discretion*

There are two forms of semi-official discretion in access to USEN: Vice Chancellor’s list and staff quota. These two methods of entry are those that were previously termed ‘discretion’ in Federal Government guidelines. At the time of my fieldwork this aspect of entry had been removed *de jure* but still operated *de facto*. A senior member of staff at the university informed me that there were still approximately 10% of places – thus remaining constant with the previous official policy – available through discretion, which can be split into two: VC’s list, which covers ‘university interests’ or ‘friends of the university’, meaning major donors; and staff quota, which covers children of staff or significant alumni.

Vice Chancellor’s list is an important aspect of university admissions and refers to places offered to students at the discretion of the Vice Chancellor. Due to the sensitivity of issues such as this and the seniority of the Vice Chancellor, I found ascertaining exactly who gains admission through VC’s list difficult. There remains a great deal of discretion-within-discretion in these admissions. It is not simply the case that if someone donates a certain amount to the university, their child will automatically be offered a place. Instead, they must first score over 200 on JAMB, then they are free to ask the VC if a place may be found for their child, a favour he may or may not grant. I am unaware of the degree of flexibility afforded to particularly important people with regard to the 200 cut-off. The fact that many places on the VC’s list go to children of important politicians or businessmen correlates closely with Smith’s (2006: 70) argument that discretionary places at secondary schools may go to “powerful people [the school] cannot afford not to help”. Senior university staff often receive calls from politicians asking for entry for their children, sometimes from the very politicians who removed discretion from admissions criteria. This places significant pressure on these staff as often the same politicians will later authorise the university’s budget and refusing entry to their child may have negative implications for the whole university.

Staff quota is the second category that comes under the general heading of semi-official discretion. It refers to the practice of providing staff members, as a form of benefit in addition to salary, with a place at the university to study for the member of staff's spouse or child. Smith (2005: 41) comments that this is seen by staff as "one of the biggest perks of the office". Despite the Federal Government's removal of discretion from official entry criteria, staff quota is still widely and openly used. There is undoubtedly overlap between VC's list and staff quota, with staff quota places often feeding into what becomes known as VC's list. This reflects the pressure put on senior members of staff such as the VC to accommodate candidates from a variety of different constituencies.

The semi-formal nature of these types of entry reveals much about the relationship between state and society in Nigeria. Until the Federal Government decided to remove discretionary entry, it had been officially enshrined in university policy that 10% of entrants should be decided by the VC. This reflects, first, the extremely hierarchical nature of decision-making at USEN, where lower-ranking staff can make representations to the VC but he (it is always a 'he'; there has never been a female Vice Chancellor at USEN) will always retain the final decision. Second, it illustrates the degree to which individuals cannot be conceptualised without reference to kinship ties. The fact that accepting students on the basis of their relationship with staff is widely accepted also illustrates the extent to which Nigerians view supporting kin as an essential obligation, as Smith (2001) suggests. Staff quota can be viewed as an institutionalised aspect of "going with the grain" in African politics. This is a concept outlined by Kelsall (2008) in which he argues that development policy in Africa should come closer to modes of accountability and morality of African societies, particularly family, community and religion. However, the recent removal of staff quota from official policy reveals that legislators are moving away, rather than towards, this type of governance.

#### *Extra-legal methods of entry*

All students applying to USEN wish to see their names on the first list published, meaning that they have gained entry on the basis of merit. Once the first list is released some students will wait to see if they have gained entry through the second, supplementary list, while others will resolve to work towards the next year's examinations. A significant number, however, will seek to gain admission through alternative means. This often takes place after the end of the admission process, which lasts from December-March each academic year.

Students use a variety of different methods to secure admission. This process is chaotic and competitive, with those in a position to influence events coming under extreme pressure to assist their friends, relatives and co-religionists to help them gain a place. The lengths to which some students go to ensure admission are surprising, such as paying large sums to people who have no official connection with the university in the hope that they will be true to their word and can help them gain entry. Use of extra-legal practices is, understandably, higher in high-demand courses. Students seeking to 'lobby' their way into medicine, for instance, would find that the fee was considerably higher than for other subjects. The use of contractors or mercenaries – the term used by Nigerians to describe those who take exams for others in exchange for financial

reward – was also higher for high-demand subjects, reflecting the importance of gaining entry to one of these subjects.

There are limits to the numbers of students that can be accepted into university, though overall numbers have been rising in the last few years (University of South Eastern Nigeria, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006). The numbers of students gaining entry through extra-legal methods often means that other students who have gained admission through official channels lose their places. At times during the admissions process, lists of names of students who have been admitted to study particular courses will be pinned up on notice-boards. However, during the process of compiling these lists, students' names may be added through 'backyard runs' – where lobbying or connection to an influential person sees your name added to a list – resulting in the removal of some other students' names. It is therefore possible to gain entry through merit only to see your place taken by someone with a lower exam score but who has been able to manipulate the admissions system to their advantage. In cases such as these the student whose name has been removed will be reluctant to question the decision because, first, it is unlikely to make any difference and second, they fear that they may be 'marked' as a troublemaker and this may have a negative impact on subsequent applications, much like the "troublemaker toward whom favorable treatment should not be extended" in Lipsky's research (1980: xiv).

#### Lobbying

Lobbying refers to a student gaining admission to the university through monetary payment. The term is a synonym for the standard English term bribery, though I never heard this term used at USEN. Students or their parents or friends may lobby academic staff or non-academic staff, particularly those who work in the admissions department, to help them secure a place. Lobbying is extremely common and is often closely linked to the phenomenon of connection, whereby a prospective student will use a personal connection to assist them in getting a place. If a prospective student seeks to lobby but does not have a personal connection, they may find that they lose their money on a fraudulent admission. The amounts of money required to secure admission vary and are often open to negotiation. Usually students find themselves paying over ₦50,000 (approximately £200) to secure admission, with the figure being higher, sometimes up to ₦200,000 (approximately £800) depending on the demand for that particular course.

#### Connection

Students may also try to use personal connections – often referred to as just 'connection' or *imma mmadu* (IM), an Igbo term meaning 'who you know' – to secure admission. Those outside the university will try and contact anyone working inside, but more senior academic staff – such as Heads of Department and Deans of Faculty – and those working in the admissions department are most likely to be able to help. If there is a close connection – usually kin-based – between the member of staff and the prospective student, the student may not be required to pay, but in the vast majority of cases some payment, even if just a token gesture, will be required. Indeed, one respondent told me that 'connection' simply means that you know someone who you can pay. Many of the lecturers I spoke to mentioned that they are put under pressure from friends and relatives to assist in getting them or their wards into USEN. According to some lecturers, there is a belief among those outside the university that if they 'have' someone inside the system this person will be able to manipulate the admissions

process in any way they choose: “they have this feeling that once you work in a university maybe you ... own the admission process and then you can always snap your fingers and then you have somebody within any course of your choice” (Chizoba Ndukwe, interview, 2 October 2007).

There is a perception among outsiders that those on the inside are able to exploit the process as much or as little as they wish and there is little understanding of the pressures that staff are under from others inside the university. In reality, the ability to manipulate admissions depends largely on the staff member’s position, senior academic staff and those in admissions having significantly greater ability to install their clients than more junior academic staff or non-academic staff outside the admissions department. Hierarchy is a very strong characteristic of USEN with those at the top of the university hierarchy having huge scope to act as they wish. Those lower down the social order, however, are subject to the whims of those above them. Seniority, rather than ability, is used to determine status.

Lecturers stated that the people who contact them asking for help to gain admission usually come from one of three categories: people from their kinship or home communities, friends, and people who worship in their church. The number of people seeking help will depend on the strength of ties each lecturer has in these three arenas. Literature on Nigeria (such as Smith, 2001, 2005, 2006) tends to suggest that kinship is the strongest of these, but my research found that this may not always be the case. Friendship is an important aspect of extra-legal practices at USEN, and a number of people told me that the combination of kinship and friendship is likely to be the most fruitful combination for those seeking informal assistance to enter university. However, others commented that kinship will always play the strongest part.

Smith (2001: 353) comments on the impact of “social distance” in determining the amount of money changing hands in an informal encounter. He suggests that for close kin, no money whatsoever would need to change hands; for a looser connection – in Smith’s example a friend of the sister of the person seeking a favour – money would need to be offered; while for a complete stranger the request would be rejected outright. This illustrates the need for personal connections even when the prospective entrant is able to pay. Three criticisms can, however, be made of Smith’s assertion. First, he implies that social distance refers only to kinship and that friendship relations are invariably weaker than kin. My research illustrates that this does not always hold true and a particularly strong friendship could, for instance, exert stronger pressure than weak kinship ties. Second, the implication of Smith’s work is that there is some implicit formula for calculating the level of ‘dash’ – the money required to ‘grease the wheels’ of any transaction – according to the level of connection. In fact extra-legal processes are much messier than this, and much more complicated; negotiation often plays a strong role, as do the seniority and wealth of the participants in the transaction. Third, I am unconvinced by his assertion that a request from a stranger would be rejected. The decision to accept money from a stranger would likely be taken according to the circumstances of the transaction and many Nigerians would have no hesitation in accepting the money.

Often the precise relationship between prospective student and the person they seek to help them – sometimes referred to as the person’s ‘saviour’ – is important. The

example of Emmanuel Adeniyi illustrates this well. Emmanuel applied to study mathematics education at USEN. He scored 209 on JAMB, but the cut-off was 218 and so Emmanuel was not admitted through merit. He decided to contact a man he described as his uncle, though they had no blood relationship, who was a former Dean of Faculty and Senior Lecturer. He described his uncle as 'no-nonsense', meaning that he was interested in ensuring meritorious standards are maintained in the university. Emmanuel did not know his uncle directly so decided he would try to "touch him from the soft spot" – approach him through someone he was very close to and thus would feel obliged to help.

Emmanuel's mother – who was happy to help because Emmanuel had scored higher than the USEN cut-off on JAMB – was very close to the prospective saviour's younger brother. She asked him to write a letter explaining Emmanuel's predicament. The letter emphasised both Emmanuel's academic credentials and the closeness of the two families, who came from the same community but also, crucially, the uncle was a close friend of Emmanuel's father. Emmanuel explained to me that the friendship between the man and Emmanuel's father was the factor that swung the request in his favour. This friendship would mean a degree of obligation over and above that felt through community ties. Emmanuel explained to me that, in situations such as this, helping someone was based on:

1. Kinship and friendship
2. Friendship
3. Kinship.

Of perhaps equal importance to the relationship between student and saviour is the relationship between saviour and someone who is able to authorise a student's entrance into USEN, in this case the Vice Chancellor. Once again, the issue of obligation comes into play, but in this case combined with a notion of hierarchy – the obligation to assist those perceived to be of importance. Emmanuel's uncle wrote to the Vice Chancellor, a process he explained to me:

The relationship with the VC's not personal. After he wrote the letter he didn't request to see the VC face-to-face. He took the letter and dropped it with the VC's aide, where he knew the VC would get the letter and submit to the VC, because at his position, the letter must get to the VC, nobody will dare try to sideline this letter, because already he's well established, he headed one Faculty out of eight faculties, so anybody that sees his signature will be very careful to submit it to the Vice Chancellor (Emmanuel Adeniyi, interview, 17 April 2007).

Without responding directly to either Emmanuel's uncle or Emmanuel, the Vice Chancellor added Emmanuel's name to the list of students to study maths education. It is clear that part of the reason for the letter appearing on the Vice Chancellor's desk, and him acting upon it, was the seniority of Emmanuel's uncle. More junior staff – unless they had a different connection – would undoubtedly experience greater difficulty in getting through to the VC. Emmanuel was not asked to pay anything to his uncle for the assistance, in contrast to Emeka Orji, who had paid ₦70,000 for similar assistance. The biggest difference between the two cases appears to be the seniority and possibly wealth of the saviour involved, rather than the closeness of the relationship: both saviours were members of the student's home community and family friends; Emmanuel's was considerably higher in the USEN hierarchy than Emeka's.

The difference between the two cases could be seen to reflect a logic of appropriate distribution commented on by Smith (2005): it would have been inappropriate for Emmanuel's uncle, as a very senior member of staff, to ask for payment; for Emeka's saviour, who was much lower in the hierarchy, it would have been viewed as acceptable. Emeka did not voice any complaint at being asked to pay for the assistance he received.

Often having a connection means little more than asking this person for assistance in information regarding which courses are full up. Information on places left on courses during the admissions process is not made public so those with connections are at an automatic advantage. It is not clear why the university chooses not to publish this information – I was unable to find the official reason – but is likely to be a combination of administrative lapses and a desire to ensure that the first opportunity to fill empty places goes to the well-connected. This echoes Blundo's (2006: 807) argument that in Senegal some administrative procedures are kept deliberately opaque in order that only certain people benefit.

Connections form a very important part of the process of accessing USEN, especially after the 'merit' list has been published. For students not on this list, attempting to gain admission without the ability to lobby or any connection can be almost impossible. For those willing to pay but without connections the situation may be even worse, as they may end up with a fraudulent application, as the *agents* section below makes clear. Lack of advice from an insider can make the process seem impossible to understand, as Blundo and Olivier de Sardan (2006: 140) comment when they characterise a different West African bureaucracy – in this case Nigerien courts – as illustrating "the impenetrability of structures from the perspective of the anonymous user".

### Ethnicity

If a prospective student doesn't have a personal connection with a member of staff they may be able to utilise broader loyalties such as around ethnicity to assist in gaining entry. The term ethnicity is commonly used to refer to groups of people who are members of broadly-defined ethnic groups ('Igbo', 'Yoruba', 'Igala', 'Tiv' and so on). This meaning is important at USEN but, in a university where nearly 90% of the students are Igbo it can be narrower, intra-ethnic groupings that are of greater importance, as also noted by van den Berghe (1973) and Young (1981) at the University of Ibadan, a predominantly Yoruba university. These sub-ethnic categories often intersect with official administrative units – states and Local Government Areas (LGAs). So, in access to USEN, an influential member of staff may assist a student seeking admission on the basis of the fact that they are both, for instance, from Imo state. This illustrates the fact that in Nigeria 'ethnic' loyalties are not primordial and constant, but may be opportunistic and open to change: an Ebonyi indigene, for instance, may give preference to his state-mate when he applies to USEN, despite the fact that just fifteen years ago the two people were from different states and might have had distinctly different views on whether they owed each other loyalty. Ethnic loyalty in this case therefore stems from a closeness that appears primordial on the surface, and may feel so to the participants, but is actually mediated by the 'modern' state. This point – that patterns of ethnic identification are influenced by administration as well as ethnicity – is made forcefully by Mustapha (2004), who argues that three of the seven major ethnic cleavages in Nigeria incorporate administrative units in ethnic rivalry.

There are instances at USEN where intra-ethnic considerations have a large impact. A number of my informants commented on the policy of the university's current administration of actively seeking members of staff from the VC's home state and, more particularly, his community. This can be seen as an example of intra-ethnic mobilisation. It is not clear whether this policy also applied to students, but anecdotal evidence suggests that it did. Despite this, the general feeling among students as to the impact of the current administration on access was that it was doing a very good job in increasing the numbers of students admitted through merit, which would indicate a converse reduction in kin- and ethnically-based entry.

### Agents

At USEN there are a large number of people known as agents who work unofficially to assist students to gain places to study. These people also assist students to pass courses once inside USEN, though securing admissions is their primary function. Their role is to provide students with the registration number they require to take up a place in exchange for financial reward. In many cases, agents will work for people inside the system, particularly lecturers and those working in the admissions department, who want to make extra income but do not want to risk their positions by meeting prospective students directly. They therefore employ agents to act as intermediaries. Agents are often ex-students who already have close personal links with a lecturer or member of admissions staff who engages in 'lobbying'. In many cases the member of staff will inform the agent how much money they want for organising admission for a student. The agent then may, in addition to the cut they will receive from the member of staff, add their own mark-up. However, as with the price of almost anything in Nigerian society, these prices are subject to negotiation between the prospective student and the agent. Agents working at USEN are similar to those highlighted by Blundo (2006: 802-803) as working in a variety of Senegalese petty bureaucracies, "informal actors evolving on the fringe of the administration [who] guide the public services users through the complexities of the Senegalese bureaucracy", though at USEN these actors did not appear to have the same importance as in Senegal, where Blundo suggests they are "ubiquitous" (2006: 817).

An important issue is that of false registrations. Often an agent, knowing how desperate students are to secure admission, will provide a registration number they know is fake and "eat the [student's] money".<sup>24</sup> Agents may tell students that they are closely linked to a senior member of staff in order to convince them to part with their money. Many students have gone through an entire university course of four years before they realised that their original registration was false. In this instance, the student will have to use other extra-legal methods to extricate themselves from their situation. One of my respondents gave an example of two friends, both of whom entered the university through agents, having been inadequately qualified originally. At the beginning of their final year, their qualifications were checked and found to be substandard so their registrations were removed. Both students were, at the time of the interview, still in the university trying to "beg their way out" of their difficulties (Chidimma Ugwuoke, interview, 20 September 2007). One student comes from a rich family, so is likely to be able to pay her way out of her predicament, while the second is

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<sup>24</sup> To 'eat' refers to the practice of taking something in exchange for providing a service but failing to provide the service promised. The phrase to 'chop' is also used.



not, and is “just praying that something will happen” (ibid). My respondent made the very clear case that having someone that you trust at the time of admission is crucial in minimising the chances of securing a fake admission. If you do not, it is “as good as throwing your money away for nothing” (ibid).

There was some difference of opinion among my respondents as to the closeness of agents to those within the university system. A student respondent told me that agents are invariably closely linked to members of staff, while a member of staff informed me that they acted alone. This was a pattern that I noticed across my research – members of USEN staff were often happy to acknowledge the existence of non-formal mechanisms of access, but would invariably place the blame on students engaging in ‘sharp practices’ without acknowledging the crucial role of staff in this process.

### **Succeeding at the University of South Eastern Nigeria for students**

As with access, the opportunities for students to succeed at USEN – to pass their exams and leave with a good degree – are decided by a combination of factors that include a great deal more than simple academic achievement. Personal connections and financial corruption also play an important role in the educational careers of some students. The issues that influence student success overlap with those influencing access but are different in a number of ways. In many ways the student has more say over his or her destiny once entry to the university has been secured because it is their decision whether to work hard and attempt to achieve through merit or to engage in ‘sorting’ courses, paying others to write assignments and exam malpractice, all of which are commonplace at USEN. Prospective entrants are, to a large degree, subject to the whims and caprices of those in positions of influence; once inside, the student is much more the architect. As with access, some students are committed to achieving success through formal means. But there are also significant numbers who are not. This section examines the methods employed by these students to navigate their way through USEN.

### **Scholarship**

As noted above, in Igboland a university degree is seen as a possession that is highly valued by all. It carries status and is a prerequisite for many jobs. Indeed, Ekeh (1975: 104, original emphasis) has argued that “in post-colonial Africa, attaining the requisite educational standard, usually phrased in terms of high-sounding university degrees, is now deemed a *guarantee* of success”. Lebeau (2000) suggests that in Nigeria this is no longer the case due to the increasing numbers of students entering university, but that a degree remains a prerequisite for “social climbing” (2000: 18). This has resulted in large numbers of students entering the Nigerian university system without any particular interest in the subject they are studying, nor in academic activity more generally. These students are often described as ‘unserious’ and are a feature of all Nigerian universities. Lecturers are scathing about the quality of some of the students entering USEN, the predominant feeling being that the standard of students has fallen over time. Part of the reason for the poor quality of some students is the number who enter the university through extra-legal means. ‘Serious’ lecturers – those who are interested in academic study and less in using the university as a means to acquire wealth – tend to have problems with many students because they do not enter university to learn, but to come out with a degree having done as little work as possible. The lecturers that are most highly favoured by the majority of students are likely to be

those who are witty, engage in repartee with students in class and will 'bend' to the will of students, meaning that they will accept malpractice and 'sorting'. Lebeau (2000: 164) suggests that some students and lecturers are engaged in "reciprocal instrumentalisation" that rewards both, lecturers financially and students through being allowed to pass courses that they did not deserve to pass. In contrast, lecturers who are very 'serious', will not sort courses and demand high standards from students may be favoured by some, but the majority will term them 'sadistic', 'harsh' or 'wicked'. These differences highlight the university as a site of contestation between different viewpoints as to its societal role: between those for whom its official, stated role – as a seat of academic learning – is paramount, and those for whom it is an arena that can be legitimately appropriated for personal gain. It also illustrates the way that the negotiation of the relationship between official and unofficial norms within the university is as much a product of the actions of service users – students – as providers – members of staff (see also Blundo, 2006 for a similar argument about Senegalese bureaucracy).

### ***Extra-legal methods of success***

#### ***Exam malpractice***

Many of the techniques employed by exam cheats inside USEN are the same as those employed in exams for those seeking entry. Use of microchips, collusion with invigilators, writing an exam paper outside the hall and bringing it in and impersonation are all common. Students will often make sure they sit near their close friends so they can exchange answers. One of the most interesting aspects of exam malpractice is its normality and acceptance by both students and staff (Opata, 2003). I invigilated eight internal exams and estimate that the numbers of students taking part in malpractice of one kind or another is around ninety percent. Talking to one's neighbour in an exam is not viewed as malpractice and nearly every student took part in it. If this type of 'malpractice' – defined by the university's rules but not by the actors concerned – is removed, the numbers are significantly lower. Among students, malpractice is so widespread and accepted that some intelligent students sit at the back in exams in order to help less gifted colleagues and others write two papers during an exam, one for themselves and one for a friend.

During exams, students who are caught talking are either ignored or punished by being forced to stand for a short time or moved to a different desk. It is rare for an invigilator to remove a student from the exam hall or recommend that they fail the exam, except for more serious malpractice such as use of microchips. Invigilators tend to be judged by students on the level to which they tolerate or even condone malpractice. Those who opt to punish cheating students are termed wicked or sadistic. By contrast, a number of my respondents noted that other invigilators may let students cheat because they want to be liked. This illustrates the lack of commitment to the official rules of the university and the fact that allowing students to cheat is seen as the norm rather than the exception. This dichotomy is also noted by Blundo and Olivier de Sardan (2006: 100) in their research in Niger, in which two women in charge of a water pump are given nicknames: the one who plays by the official rules is known as "the ungodly one" while the second, who exhibits more flexibility, is known as "the believer". At USEN the terminology used to describe 'strict' invigilators includes such terms as sadistic and wicked. This moralistic discourse is reflected in some academic literature on exam

malpractice in Nigeria, Opata (2003: 42) arguing that the main cause of malpractice is “shamelessness” and Odo (2002) suggesting that the main solution to malpractice is reducing the Nigerian focus on materialism.

### *Favouritism*

USEN exhibits a strong culture of patronage in the form of what may be termed ‘godfatherism’, ‘favouritism’ or ‘grooming’, a phenomenon that Joseph (1987: 56) suggests is at work across Nigerian society. It takes place both within the body of academic staff and between academic staff and students and forms part of the hierarchy that characterises USEN. It was described to me by one lecturer as a form of apprenticeship, whereby students or junior academic staff are groomed academically until they are ready to take over from their masters. In this section I will examine the relationships between staff patrons and their student assistants, while the similar but distinct issues related to intra-staff relationships are examined in chapter five.

Many, though not all, lecturers have a favourite student who acts as their informal assistant or helper. These people help out with such activities as marking essay and exam scripts, invigilating exams and enforcing the discipline of the lecturer. Some assistants may even teach courses for their patron. For lecturers who engage in extra-legal methods of income generation, assistants may link them with students who are prepared to ‘sort’ courses or sell their handouts or books. Assistants may also involve themselves in non-academic activities such as procuring women for the lecturer, or use their connection to make money for themselves through ‘sorting’ courses without the lecturer’s knowledge. This is one reason why some more ‘serious’ lecturers are wary of using assistants.

Choosing a favourite may depend on a number of different factors. In many cases academic quality is the most important factor, though one lecturer-student relationship was described to me as being based on “their propensity for underhand deals and sharp practices” (Chizoba Ndukwe, interview, 28 August 2007). Similarly, the student and member of staff may become affiliated with one another through a campus fraternity organization or ‘cult’.<sup>25</sup> The character of the assistant is the most important factor and there can be little doubt that, regardless of other considerations, if the lecturer and student do not get along, the relationship is unlikely to be a successful one. Ethnicity and kinship, in contrast to more general patterns of patronage at work in Nigerian society, appear to be relatively minor considerations among lecturers choosing favourites at USEN.

A related phenomenon at USEN is the relationship between some students and the informal or semi-formal groupings I characterise in chapter five as factions. Due to the difficulties of collecting data on a topic as sensitive as this, I was unable to glean in-depth information about the relationships between students and factions. But my data does suggest that there are some students who are loosely affiliated with a faction and who benefit when their faction is ‘in charge’ of their department. There is some crossover between this phenomenon and student politics more broadly, in that a powerful individual or faction may seek to get favoured students installed as officers of

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<sup>25</sup> ‘Cults’ are organised but secret groups of students who participate in activities such as extortion, gangsterism and violence. The synonym in standard English is gang.

USEN students' union in order that they can do their bidding. This links closely to the arguments made about favourites above: by assisting a member of staff, students believe that they may reap future benefits from the association. I discuss this issue in the section on motivation for extra-legal practice below. Some students may also favour a particular faction based on their beliefs about extra-legal practice. Students who are not interested in scholarship and seek to gain a degree without working will be particularly happy if the select club faction, which tends to favour extra-legal methods of achievement, gains control of the department because their chances of gaining a degree through paying rather than hard work will be enhanced. Hard working students, by contrast, are more likely to favour the anti-select club faction, which is less likely to grant "unmerited favour" (Frank Usanga, interview, 6 September 2007) and will therefore benefit those students who opt to work hard.

#### *Other extra-legal methods of success*

Often lecturers produce handouts to accompany their modules. Some lecturers, however, demand that students purchase these handouts and will not let them pass unless they do. Some lecturers take this process even further and tell students that they must purchase a 'textbook' in order to pass the module even though it has little or nothing to do with the course. An example occurred when I was due to invigilate an exam and arrived to find large numbers of students outside the exam hall. I asked a couple of students what the problem was and was told that before the students went in to the exam hall the lecturer would check that they had purchased 'the textbook'. I asked what the textbook was and was told that it was a copy of a US journal that had nothing to do with the course, which students had to purchase for ₦1000 (approximately £4). With a class size of approximately 200, if every student purchased the handout the lecturer would make around ₦200,000 (approximately £800), which corresponds to around 2-3 months' salary for the lecturer concerned. One student commented that "it's just like dashing him money". In general students are not happy to have to pay lecturers in this way but they accept that this is how the system operates. These students therefore become "active participants in the social reproduction of corruption even as they are also its primary victims and principal critics" (Smith, 2006: 5). Among these students there is also a "fatalism and an inability to conceive that the situation could be any other than it is" (Chabal and Daloz, 2006: 267), illustrated by the lack of complaint at situations such as this. This is partly as a result of the sanctions that students may face if they complain, an issue I consider in more detail below.

There is a functional side to paying for handouts for some students, in that if a student buys a handout from a lecturer and still does badly, the lecturer may opt to pass them anyway because they have bought the handout. This, in turn, may have negative implications for those who have not 'sorted' the lecturer, who may find that, because only a certain proportion of students can pass, that they fail because pass marks have been awarded to those who sorted the lecturer. Similarly, one respondent told me that in one course he could not afford to purchase the required textbook. He found that he, and all other students who failed to purchase the book, received a mark of 39% when 40% was the pass mark.

Due to the lucrative nature of courses with large numbers of students, many lecturers actively try to secure these courses to teach for themselves. They will get postgraduate students to mark essays and exams – thus removing any potential negative effects of

taking such a large class – and are able to make large amounts of money from selling handouts or textbooks. This is the equivalent of what Blundo (2006: 806) terms the “juicy” as opposed to the “dry” position: one with a “strong density of transactions ... where the holder is on the ground, in direct connection with the users” and that is therefore particularly lucrative. Postgraduate students are often keen to help marking essays and exams, as it simultaneously puts them in the favour of the lecturer, who may be able to influence possible employment or other benefits later, and provides an opportunity to make money sorting undergraduate students’ courses. The lucrative nature of large classes for lecturers makes course allocation the source of some conflict within departments, as many – though not all – lecturers want to be allocated the most heavily-subscribed courses.

Extra-legal processes sometimes intersect with the official, stated aims of the university. The renowned leader of a campus ‘cult’ paid a large sum to have his final degree grade increased to 2:1. Once he had done this, it was announced that all students who had been awarded marks of 2:1 or higher would be required to verbally defend their work. The cult leader, fearing he would be found out, panicked and returned to the exams and records department where he paid three times as much as he had originally paid to get his grade reduced to 2:2. Instances such as this reveal that characterisations of African public service as being purely patrimonial, in which official rules are completely ignored in favour of power politics, are inaccurate and reflect the lack of empirical grounding of much research.

Personal relationships between students and staff may also have an impact on success, both positive and negative. Indeed, the personal relationship a member of staff has with a student may directly influence the grade that student receives on their degree. One student told me that lecturers “check your character” and if you are on the borderline between two degree classes they will push you up to the higher grade if they like you or down if they don’t. This practice is part of the larger phenomenon of lecturers’ decisions being influenced by non-academic factors, but also illustrates that simple personal affection may influence decision-making. Characterisations suggesting that patronage is based almost entirely on kinship are therefore wide of the mark.

If a student does badly on an assessed piece of work they may attempt to get the grade changed retrospectively, either through ‘sorting’ the lecturer financially or attempting to use connections. If the student is connected to a senior member of staff this can be particularly useful, as pressure can be brought to bear on the member of staff teaching the course, again reflecting the importance of hierarchy. One of my respondents recounted a situation in which a female student, the daughter of a very senior member of staff, requested that he assign a grade to her for an exam she had not sat. The student came into his office and he was “obliged to treat her like a princess” (Dr. Christopher Nwangwu, interview, 1 August 2007) because of her father. This particular respondent was known for his dislike of the use of connections for personal gain and refused the student’s request. It is likely that this attitude had a negative impact on Dr. Nwangwu’s ability to gain the promotions he felt he was entitled to, illustrating the importance of obligations to those higher up the university hierarchy over academic considerations. Instances such as this reflect the personalisation and hierarchy of some decision-making at USEN: the attitude of the student was a product

of her link to an extremely influential person. This attitude would have been unlikely had the connection been to someone of lower rank within the USEN hierarchy.

One way in which the negative influence of patronage manifests itself for students at USEN is through personal feuds between students and members of staff. These may arise for a variety of reasons – such as a student making a complaint against a member of staff or the two having a difference of opinion in a lecture – and often result in students being ‘marked’ or ‘victimised’. In particular, students are concerned that victimisation on the part of lecturers may result in them incurring an unwarranted failure on a particular course or being incorrectly accused of exam malpractice. Sometimes they will fail the course that they have complained about but they may equally fail a different course. In these cases students believe that lecturers act in concert so that a lecturer will, in order not to be accused of failing a student simply because he or she has made a complaint, inform a different lecturer who will then ensure that the student fails a different module. This illustrates the atmosphere of competition and conflict between staff and students, rather than one of interdependence and respect, and again illustrates the difficulties “anonymous” – in that they are unknown to the lecturer – students face (Blundo and Olivier de Sardan, 2006).

The pan- or sub-ethnic origin of the student may also have an influence over their chances of success. This may become particularly important if the member of staff concerned is from the same state, LGA or community as the student, as this may mean that the normal standard required to pass a course is more flexibly interpreted than might otherwise be the case. This is particularly the case when individuals from the local area of USEN are concerned. There is a feeling that, as the university is located in ‘their’ town, local people have a greater right to success and therefore local lecturers are likely to help local students. This is made easier by the fact that many Igbo surnames are linked to particular communities so the student may not even know that the lecturer has increased their grade as a result of their origin: the lecturer will see a local name and boost the score. This practice illustrates the importance of obligation to community of origin in contemporary Nigeria (Smith, 2003).

By contrast, being of non-Igbo ethnicity may have a negative effect on chances of success. The case of Johnson Nwidor illustrates this well. Johnson is from a small ethnic group in Rivers state in the Niger Delta, an area in which there is some animosity between local ethnic groups and the Igbo that stretches back to the 1967-70 Biafra war (Ibrahim, 2000). During the Biafra conflict the minority ethnic groups within Biafra tended to side with the Nigerian Federal Government, believing that their rights would be better safeguarded within a greater Nigeria than an Igbo-dominated Biafra. Johnson came to USEN to do a Masters degree after having studied at the University of Port Harcourt for his undergraduate degree. He felt that his efforts at USEN went unrewarded, first because his undergraduate degree was not from USEN and second because of his ethnicity. Johnson explained that once his supervisor found out he was from Rivers state, “his countenance changed” for the worse. The supervisor would sometimes speak to Johnson in Igbo and expect him to understand. Johnson was concerned that his desire to achieve a distinction in his Masters would be thwarted by Igbos in his department, who would not want a non-Igbo with an undergraduate degree from Port Harcourt to top the class. Eventually he was awarded a First for his Masters, but not without the intervention of the external examiner, again illustrating that the

official rules sometimes trump particularistic demands. Johnson felt that had it been left up to the department he would not have received a First. He also felt that instances such as this are quite common at USEN. However, I was struck by the different attitude displayed by non-Igbo students during a focus group, which can be summarised using my comments at the time:

The students were all incredibly loyal both to USEN and to Nigeria ... I was particularly surprised that the students defended the institution so wholeheartedly given that they are not Igbo and USEN can therefore not be seen as 'their' institution in the way an Igbo might see it (non-Igbo social science focus group notes, 27 June 2007).

Though I didn't ask these students specifically about their individual experiences as non-Igbos at USEN, all stated that they were impressed with the university. During the focus group I asked the students if they felt that USEN is "a university for all", and all stated that, merit considerations apart, it was a university for all. None mentioned ethnicity as having an impact on either their decision to come to USEN or their chances of success once there. Interestingly, the student I had employed to take notes during this and other focus groups was Johnson Nwidor. I discussed the students' responses with Johnson and our collective conclusion was that I would get different, less positive responses from students if I interviewed them one-to-one, as opposed to in a focus group setting. I therefore found focus groups to provide particularly 'frontstage' responses from participants, illustrating their bluntness as a research tool that I remarked upon in chapter three.

Some male lecturers at USEN participate in 'sexual sorting' – offering, or sometimes demanding, that young female students have sexual relationships with them in exchange for higher grades. Sometimes this is instigated by a female student who wants to pass a course, though this is less common. Sometimes male lecturers will fail female students unless they accede to their demands. According to my research a large number of male lecturers participate in practices such as this. One female student told me that "as a female student, you expect it" (Chidimma Ugwuoke, interview, 20 September 2007). The practice was widely talked about to me by both male and female students and lecturers once a trusting relationship had been established with the respondent.

### **Motivation for extra-legal methods**

As noted in detail above, USEN is the site of complex interrelationships between the use of formal and extra-legal methods, both in accessing the university and succeeding once inside. A variety of different reasons were given for the use of extra-legal methods, one of the most common being a significant reason why the practice has become so prevalent: 'everyone else does it' and to not participate would put one at a distinct disadvantage. Apart from the most gifted – and sometimes even for these students – not having, or not taking advantage of, personal connections consigns you to marginalisation and failure, as I myself came to realise when trying to acquire, for instance, a medical certificate and a visa. Before attempting to procure a visa extension I entered what Blundo (2006: 809) terms "a ceaseless search for personal angles" in my relationship with the Nigerian immigration service and my life was made considerably easier through the connections I was able to establish. It is not difficult to

understand why, when so much is at stake, people make use of whatever means are at their disposal.

A second major argument used by both staff and students at USEN to justify participation in extra-legal activity is poverty. It was often suggested to me that until poverty is tackled, corruption will remain. A connected justification is that people – particularly men – are more likely to participate in extra-legal methods of achieving success because they have to support an extended family. Respondents would often contrast their situation with those faced in developed countries such as the UK, in which there is little or no pressure to support family members in the same way.

Third, there is significant pressure placed on all participants – staff and students – to achieve ‘success’ alongside relatively little consideration of the methods employed to achieve this. Success may mean many things, but what is clear is that gaining a university education is of great importance in modern Igboland, for reasons of status as much as anything else. Among students and their parents, there is huge pressure to gain a good degree but relatively little pressure to gain the knowledge normally required to acquire one. This leads to the use of extra-legal means to ensure they achieve this. Personal success will not only result in increased status for the individual, but also for his or her family and community of origin, therefore increasing the desire to succeed at all costs.

Fourth, success in Igboland is judged in many ways, of which financial success is one. Igbo people are acknowledged within Nigeria as being rather materialistic (Dr Ken Agbo, interview, 2 October 2007; Ottenberg 1967: 35), and owning the trappings of success is viewed as essential in certain circles. It could be argued that this represents a modern version of pre-colonial Igbo emphasis on material gain as a marker of status (Uchendu, 1965), but also has parallels in the corruption and materialism of the warrant chief era in Igboland (Njoku, 2005; Afigbo, 1972). During my time at USEN I attended a number of lectures on development in which the lecturer suggested a ‘cultural perspective’ on poverty in which a man should be viewed as poor if he did not have a house, a car and a wife. The lecturer also stated that there is only one way to judge success – money – and that successful criminals could be seen as ‘achieving’. Many students appeared to agree with him. This viewpoint is indicative of a norm in which pursuit of wealth, with no consideration over how that wealth is acquired, is paramount, and also suggests the rise of 419 in Nigeria, a term that refers to corruption that is viewed as selfish and outside ‘traditional’ patrimonial norms of reciprocity and sharing.

### ***Motivation for semi-formal discretion***

Vice Chancellor’s list and staff quota are heavily entrenched within Nigerian higher education. As a result, motivation for their existence is not generally discussed as they are seen as part of the normal educational landscape. A place for one’s child to study at the university is seen as both reward for service to the university and a reflection of the strength of kinship: one lecturer told me that “you would not want to be teaching other people’s children when you feel that you should be teaching your own” (Chigozie Emerenini, interview, 23 March 2007). This illustrates the way that socially-based loyalties – here to ‘your own’ children, which I took to mean those from Chigozie’s kinship or community rather than his own biological children – trump a belief in individuals as discrete entities, unconnected to ties of kinship. It also reflects the lack of



acceptance of the formal rules of the institution, which favour merit, by many staff members. Norms of supporting kin remain stronger pulls than bureaucratic norms on the behaviour of many.

### ***Motivation for favouritism***

The motivations for both staff and students to have or be favourites respectively are numerous. For the member of staff they have someone who can take some of the burden of their job or, if they engage in extra-legal activities, they can pursue these without needing to have direct student contact, which protects them from allegations of improper conduct. For the student, there are likewise significant benefits, some of which the lecturer who employed them will be aware of and others they may not. Examples of benefits the student may gain are that the lecturer may not mark their work as severely as they would have done and certainly will not allow them to fail; it provides the student with status; the lecturer may intimate, or even actually promise, that the student will be awarded an academic position or other benefit at the end of their studies. Indeed, personal connections between lecturers and prospective colleagues are very important in influencing employment. I deal with this issue in detail in chapter five. Lastly, some students who are employed by lecturers to mark scripts often offer to change students' grades in return for financial or sometimes sexual favours.

### ***Motivation for exam malpractice***

Exam malpractice is so widespread that it is important to understand the reasons students engage in it and why many members of staff either actively participate or at least allow it to occur. An interesting aspect of the prevalence of exam malpractice is the relationship between students and members of staff. Lecturers are likely to put the blame for malpractice squarely at the door of students who engage in it, giving reasons such as that students have learnt to cheat in primary or secondary school and bring these values with them to university or that they are lazy. Students, meanwhile, are more likely to state that lecturers are 'wicked' and don't want them to pass, or that lecturers do not set exams based on what they have taught, so students must cheat to get around this problem (see also Odo, 2002). It should also be noted that constraints such as the large numbers of students in a small space arising from poor university infrastructure such as inadequate lecturing facilities also give rise to opportunities to engage in malpractice.

The lack of commitment to providing a good service for students could be viewed as a product of the lack of commitment to the "civic public" outlined by Ekeh (1975) and the arrogance of power and low productivity among civil servants noted by Olivier de Sardan (2009). What is clear is that, as with other extra-legal methods, success is key, and the methods used to achieve success are largely disregarded. Stigma is attached to failure, but not to cheating, while the possession of a paper qualification is much more meaningful in Nigerian society than the knowledge that is supposed to be necessary to acquire it (Afigbo, 2004: 672; Lebeau, 2000; Odo, 2002). As one of my respondents pointed out, a degree certificate is "an entrée to a place you make good materially" while the knowledge that might be expected among degree holders "is not there" (Dr Christopher Nwangwu, interview, 5 September 2007). What Dr Nwangwu was pointing out was the fact that Nigerian employers want prospective employees to hold a degree but are not interested in their actual knowledge. This can be compared

to prospective applicants to USEN, who need to 'get to the bridge' – have the correct qualification – but the method through which they acquired it is largely irrelevant.

### **Social legitimacy of extra-legal methods**

Understanding the social legitimacy of extra-legal practices at USEN is difficult because people have different views on what is acceptable and what is not. I use the term social legitimacy to refer to the extent certain practices are condoned or at least accepted within USEN. Smith (2006) suggests that there are "informal rules of the game" governing what is deemed acceptable and unacceptable by those within the Nigerian public sector. My research shows that there is some truth in this, but individual viewpoints vary considerably. In any arena – department, faculty, university – what influences acceptability is the personnel who are in current occupation of senior positions. Under certain 'regimes' – within departments, faculties and the university – extra-legal practices may be accepted or even encouraged, while under others they are zealously clamped down upon. At any one time, therefore, extra-legal practices may be much more prevalent in one department than another because a different regime is in charge of the department. Students are forced to work within the norms of their department, which may be different from others and change during the course of their degree. This phenomenon is in line with literature on neopatrimonial states that suggests that offices become personalised so that it is the office holder rather than the office that determines behaviour (see for instance Clapham, 1985: 48-49). However, in contrast to other neopatrimonial writings (such as Chabal and Daloz, 1999; Chabal, 2002; Clapham, 1985) suggesting wholesale privatisation of the public arena, some regimes or office holders seek to uphold the official rules of the university while others do not. The workings of the state are therefore heterogeneous, ambiguous and open to rapid change.

Among the vast majority of staff and students at USEN, semi-official forms of discretion are seen as an acceptable method of entry, reflecting a belief that staff members, particularly those near the top of the university hierarchy, have a legitimate right to influence access. This is partly a result of the longevity of the practice and also reflects the fact that staff believe that a place for their child is a legitimate reward for service (Smith, 2005). This view reflects the closeness of kinship, as the child is rewarded for the success of the parent. Only two of my respondents did not agree with the practice of awarding places to staff relatives, believing it to be anti-meritocratic. It is notable that these staff members were considered outsiders by many, particularly those in influential positions within the university hierarchy. They belong to a minority within the university who seek to uphold the stated values of the university at the expense of patron-based loyalties.

Any examination of the legitimacy of extra-legal methods among students must consider the practice from two perspectives: first, that of students, the ones taking part in extra-legal practice or witnessing their colleagues and friends doing so; and second, members of staff, who are nominally the guardians of 'upright' behaviour within the university.

### ***Student perspectives***

Among students and their families, extra-legal methods were much more likely to be considered acceptable than among staff members. The social status attached to

having a child at university, particularly one as prestigious as USEN, means that many parents are prepared to stop at nothing to ensure their child gains a place. Certain practices, however, have different levels of acceptability. Gaining a place through a personal connection is seen as much more acceptable than through financial lobbying. As noted above, the possession of a 200+-score on JAMB – regardless of how this score was achieved – was a prerequisite to beginning this process. Once students had entered USEN, there were large differences in attitude towards taking part in extra-legal practice but there was general acceptance both that they occur and that there is little that can be done to stop them.

In the conduct of examinations, again, different practices had different levels of acceptability. Talking in exams, for instance, was so universal as to not be considered malpractice at all, and the penalties for talking – being made to stand for a couple of minutes or being forced to move desks – were not strong enough to prevent it from occurring. But even more serious examples of malpractice, such as the use of microchips, sometimes produced responses that suggest there is some social legitimacy to the practice. One of my respondents had caught a postgraduate student in an exam with the whole course written in note form on a microchip. The first response of the student was to try and invoke a notion of occupational solidarity: he was a prospective lecturer at a different institution and therefore, as ‘one of us’ should not be reported for cheating. The other students in the exam hall supported the student and told my respondent that he should allow the student to continue his exam. My respondent tried to make the student sign a piece of paper admitting his guilt but the student had refused and was allowed to continue writing his exam. Unless the malpractice is particularly serious, it is rare for any more significant action to be taken.

### ***Staff perspectives***

Among staff members, only one practice related to access was seen as legitimate by all my respondents: informing prospective students of departments where places are still available – assisting students to ‘shop’ – despite the fact that unconnected students would be unable to gain access to this information. All the lecturers I spoke to said they would provide this information.

A second level of informality – using personal connections to gain entry as long as the student had achieved the USEN cut-off score of 200 on JAMB – produced near-uniformity in responses: lecturers would be happy to help students to find their way into unfilled courses, provided they had achieved the USEN cut-off of 200. Below this, however, the opposite was true: lecturers were very reluctant to help those who had not achieved this score. The importance of achieving the cut-off score of 200 cannot be overstated, because above this point it was almost universally deemed acceptable for a student to use any means at their disposal to gain entry. It is between scores of 200 and the respective departmental cut-offs that ‘connection’ and ‘lobbying’ become most important.

There are, however, limits beyond which it is viewed as unacceptable to go, though these limits often depend on who is the arbiter of legitimacy in that particular arena. In a conversation about the limits of ‘connection’, I asked a respondent if it would be acceptable for a Head of Department (HoD) to accept only students from his Local Government Area (LGA) into his department. I was told that this would not be

acceptable because someone further up the hierarchy would complain. However, accepting one person from your LGA, provided they have scored above USEN cut-off, and even if they have scored below others, is perfectly acceptable. My understanding of this phenomenon is that limits to extra-legal practice existed in order to prevent the university being brought into disrepute, thus illustrating the way in which formal and extra-legal procedure should not be viewed without reference to the other. However, hierarchy is also important, as the ability of more senior staff to engage in extra-legal practice is considerably greater than those lower down.

Many of my respondents – who, as noted above, were less likely than the norm to involve themselves in any extra-legal practice – were reluctant to get involved in ‘lobbying’ – accepting money to assist students enter the university – or ‘sorting’ – accepting money to improve their grade. However, among large numbers of lecturers at USEN, lobbying is simply a way of supplementing their income, which is viewed as negative but inevitable. As a practice in which there is significant disagreement among lecturing staff as to whether to take part, lobbying is extremely controversial. The last type of extra-legal practice – sexual sorting – was universally viewed as unacceptable by those I spoke to, despite the fact that one respondent told me that 50% of male lecturers harass female students for sex.

### **Conclusion**

As the arguments outlined above suggest, there is a great deal of complexity to the relationship between students and USEN. While kin-based patronage and financial corruption do have a significant role in university life, they are tempered by official rules and there is a constant interplay between the two norms, as noted by a number of scholars of the African state (Bratton and van de Walle, 1997; Therkildsen, 2005; Erdmann and Engel, 2007; Olivier de Sardan, 2009). There will always be people within the higher education system who work for merit and who believe that the university should conform to these principles. Even among those who are not ‘serious’ members of staff, local moral boundaries mean that extra-legal practice can only go so far before the official rules act to rein it in. Staff at USEN are engaged in a constant struggle to meet the obligations they have to those outside the university while simultaneously trying to run an institution that is seen to operate on the basis of merit. Students have to work within this system, though they can also influence events by seeking to engage in lobbying or sorting lecturers or engaging in exam malpractice.

Despite this, and the desire among some groups for the use of extra-legal methods to stop, certain practices have general social acceptability, reflecting, for instance, the importance of supporting one’s kin that is so prevalent in contemporary Nigerian society (Smith, 2005). The fact that discretion has been institutionalised within the higher education system – until recently *de jure*, but still *de facto* – illustrates this very clearly. But, as noted above, there are limits to discretion as pressure is placed on individuals to support those outside the system who want to get in while simultaneously ensuring that these practices stay within acceptable boundaries. Generally the flexibility of these boundaries depends on one’s position in the university hierarchy, with significantly more discretion being awarded to those near the top.

The prevalence of extra-legal practice at USEN is also encouraged by some students. Due to the importance of a university degree for reasons of status and job acquisition,

many seek to enter the university and gain a degree without the desire to play by the official rules. For a large number of students, success is judged in terms of acquisition of a place at university and a qualification rather than knowledge and hard work. This can be viewed as a rational response to circumstances because possession of a degree is highly valued in Nigeria's crowded job market while the knowledge normally required to gain it is not valued nearly so highly. As a result, the prevalence of extra-legal methods can be viewed neither as service providers forcing service users to play by the unofficial rules nor vice-versa.

## **Chapter 5: Staff Access and Success at the University of South Eastern Nigeria**

### **Introduction**

As is the case with students, academic staff face numerous challenges in seeking to gain entry to, and success at, USEN. However, the issues facing staff members are rather different from those facing students, connections to other individuals and social networks being particularly important in staff success. The importance of personal connections make it almost impossible for a Nigerian at the bottom of the academic ladder to gain entry to USEN solely on the basis of their qualifications and experience, in contrast to the situation for students, in which at least some succeed purely on the basis of merit. Once inside the USEN system, it is also difficult to make progress without links to an influential faction, patron, or both. This chapter will examine and analyse the factors influencing staff entry and success at USEN.

There is very little literature examining the roles of academics in the Nigerian higher education system, their motivations and ways of working. van den Berghe's *Power and Privilege in an African University* attempts to analyse the influences of ethnicity, religion and politics on the life of a Nigerian university, but it was published in 1973 and both the university sector and Nigerian society have changed radically since then. A number of studies (such as Anugwom, 2002; Beckman and Jega, 1995; Jega, 1995; Eribo, 1996) examine Nigerian universities and the experiences of academics in the context of the political crises of the 1980s and 1990s, particularly during the military governments of Babangida and Abacha. Analyses of careers of staff as they enter and progress through the higher education system, or indeed any institution within the Nigerian public sector, are largely absent. This study contributes to filling this gap.

This chapter will be structured slightly differently to the previous one, because of the dominance of personal connections, in the form of factionalism and patronage, in influencing staff achievement. During my research at USEN these two issues were clearly the most important determinants of staff success: with close ties to an influential faction or patron, an individual can surmount almost any obstacle; with no ties, or ties to a weak or out-of-favour faction or patron, success of any sort becomes difficult. This chapter will outline and analyse the nature of factionalism and patronage at USEN, their influence on staff entry and achievement and their social role. It will also address more general issues related to staff access and success at USEN and the existence of non- or anti-intellectuals among academic staff.

### **Factionalism**

One of the clearest and most important features of relationships between staff at USEN is the way they are modified and influenced by membership of informal or semi-formal groupings that I characterise here as factions, though the term most commonly used to describe them by my respondents was 'camps'. I use the term faction because what I saw at USEN conforms to many of the characteristics usually ascribed to factions, which I outlined in chapter two. In particular I refer to Nicholas' (1977: 57-58) five characteristics of factions: they engage in conflict; are political; are not corporate groups; their members are recruited by a leader; and members are recruited on diverse principles; and Brumfiel's (1994) emphasis on competition between structurally and functionally similar groups. My research suggests that all of these characteristics are

broadly true of the factions at USEN. They meet all of Nicholas' criteria and have similar structures and functions, though there are small differences in their internal organisation and goals. There are also ideological differences between the two groups, much like the Mexican factions discussed by Friedrich (1968).

Another concept that is useful in analysing the factional struggle at USEN is the problem-solving network outlined by Auyero (2000). In contrast to the writings of Brumfiel and Nicholas, whose analyses are broadly theoretical, Auyero's work is anthropological and describes and analyses the day-to-day activities of Matilde's Band, a loose, unofficial grouping of associates and acolytes of a councillor in an Argentine municipality. There are a number of differences between Matilde's Band and the factions at USEN. First, numbering nearly seventy, the group is considerably larger than either of the USEN factions. Second, the group operates in the party political arena where Matilde works as a broker between the Peronist Mayor and his clients. This is important because my research is about the provision of public services – the state as theoretically neutral provider – as opposed to the realm of party politics, where competition between groups would be expected to be greater. Nonetheless, there are similarities, not least in the way Auyero conceptualises the problem-solving network as a means by which individuals can survive in a poor municipality. This strikes a chord with my research, in which lecturers must have some form of association, whether it be individual patronage or factionalism, to assist their advance up the academic ladder. Auyero's approach is to focus on the day-to-day activities and encounters that make up the problem-solving network and their effects, and in this way his approach is similar to my own.

The closest alternative to faction that could describe the USEN 'camps' is interest group. However, interest groups are more commonly regarded as organised groups seeking influence over public policy (Jordan and Maloney, 2007). The groups at USEN are not official or organised as one might expect of an interest group – indeed, they are non-corporate, to use Nicholas's term, unlike interest groups – and do not seek change in public policy. The USEN camps may seek to influence the way public policy is implemented through unofficial channels, but altering officially-enshrined university policy is not one of their goals. I discuss the goals and functions of the camps at USEN in greater detail below.

In the literature on Nigerian bureaucracy, Ottenberg (1967: 29) is the only reference I found that discusses the concept of factions. He argues that there were "in" and "out" groups of councillors in colonial south-eastern Nigeria, though he does not term these groups factions. He suggests that these groups tended to act in self-interest, in that the "out" group would often accuse the "in" group of corruption in order to gain control of the council themselves. If they succeeded, they often followed the same pattern of behaviour to the group they had ousted, suggesting factional competition operated on the basis of self-interest alone. Actions of this kind were rarely motivated by differences of political ideology but were instead designed to assist businessmen and traders to get contracts from the local government (Ottenberg, 1967: 30). Ottenberg's characterisation of factions is therefore slightly different from my own at USEN, where a combination of self-interest and efforts to change the operation of the university were motivating factors for members.

### ***Factionalism in the public administration department***

In USEN's public administration department there are two broad groupings and every member of academic staff bar one is closely allied to one of the two groups. The split exerts a large influence on departmental activity, and was acknowledged as existing by every staff member I spoke to. This is notable as many staff members sought to hide other extra-legal practices such as lobbying and sorting from me. One senior member of staff described the departmental split as "a huge chasm", "bitter" and "fascistic" (Professor Ekene Okpara, interview, 3 September 2007), while a prominent member of one faction humorously mentioned his distaste for the other in his inaugural lecture, illustrating the level to which the conflict was acknowledged around the university. Faction membership is very much a zero-sum game: by being closely allied to one faction individuals will find it extremely difficult to become close to members of the other camp. In the case of the non-aligned staff member, Chigozie Emerenini, it was even more difficult, in that – according to him – people in both camps believed he was closer to the other, meaning that establishing close, trusting relationships with anyone in the department was difficult. The difficulty of associating with both camps also had an impact on my data collection, in that during my research I took strong steps not to associate myself openly with one faction for fear of alienating myself from the other. However, these efforts were unsuccessful and members of one camp began to associate me closely with the other. In this way my own experience illustrates both that it is not possible to be close to more than one faction and the ease with which one may become associated with a group. In my case, this occurred when a member of one faction saw me socialising with a member of the other camp.

The factionalism in the public administration department began in the 1960s and 1970s when the department was largely split along ideological lines, in that there was a 'liberal' group and a 'Marxist' group, each led by a charismatic member of senior staff. At the time all the departments in social science were split along Cold War lines. During this period the ideological differences did not prevent staff from enjoying each other's company socially: differences were to do with academic debate rather than personal animosity. However, the mid-1980s were a time of great upheaval in Nigerian universities (Anugwom, 2002), as in the country as a whole, as structural adjustment and the devaluation of the Naira brought increasing scarcity following the plentiful years of the late-1970s oil boom. Conditions for staff, including salaries, worsened considerably (ibid) and some used this as a justification for participating in extra-legal practices in order to augment their wages. The splits in departments at USEN took on a different character around this time, the new cleavages being based more around beliefs on the acceptance of extra-legal practices and less on national politics, though personnel remained broadly the same: those who had been in the liberal camp were those who were viewed as most likely to participate in extra-legal practice and those in the Marxist camp the least, though this was by no means absolute. It is not clear why members of the Marxist group were less likely to participate in extra-legal practice, though strength of ideology – which would be likely to be stronger amongst Marxists, a doctrine that tends to attract strongly committed followers – over self-interest is a plausible explanation. Indeed, Nicholas (1977: 57) argues that ideology forms a greater part of factional conflict for socialists than for conservatives. The division over the issue of 'moral standards' at USEN persisted while the ideological divide did not. Many of those who had formerly been in the Marxist camp retained their belief in socialist



ideology but it no longer formed the basis of factional conflict. Lemarchand (1987) comments that factions in Africa are capable of transformation and have an inherent fluidity. The camps at USEN illustrate this capacity for change.

A further change in the ideological nature of the split took place in the late 1980s and early 1990s with the fall of the Soviet Union. Many of those who had previously declared themselves Marxists immediately disassociated themselves from the ideology and began to characterise themselves as liberals. Two of my respondents did this and were also viewed by others as particularly likely to take part in extra-legal practice. The jump to the liberal camp was viewed as crass political opportunism by those remaining on the Marxist side and illustrates the fluid nature of affiliations at USEN and the way in which ideology may be used as cover for self-interest. It was widely remarked that factionalism had become more personal and more pervasive over time.

During my time at USEN, respondents were in broad agreement that the issue of morality in working practices remained the driving force behind the split, though the related issue of attitudes towards scholarship also played a part. As one respondent put it, there are those who are “here to trade” and those who “want to contribute to the university realising its [official] objectives” (Chizoba Ndukwe, interview, 2 October 2007). These people inevitably gravitate towards others who share their views. One faction member said that he seeks to establish relationships with people with the same “value system relationship” as him, meaning a belief in hard work and upholding the stated values of the university.

There has been some debate in literature as to the role of ideology in factional competition. Friedrich (1968) argues that the most striking attribute of the factions in Mexico that he studied is the persistence of ideology in factional conflict, both in rhetoric and reality. The process of change that took place in these factions bears some resemblance to that at USEN. Factional competition began in a situation of conflict that was “unambiguously and indeed obviously ideological” (1968: 258), but later the ideological conflict itself waned, while rhetorical appeals to ideology remained. At USEN the ASC faction retains the vestiges of ideological rhetoric, though this is weaker than previously.

By contrast, Sandbrook (1968: 115) argues that factionalism includes “only minor ideological and policy implications”, while Bayart (2009: 215) views ideology as a mask for personal animosity: “[i]deology has nothing to do with it: the personal attacks in avowedly Marxist-Leninist systems simply clothe themselves in the finery of respect for dogma, the vulgate of the ‘party line’ revealing itself to be singularly well adapted to the task of setting individuals apart”. The groups at USEN came into being as a result of ideological conflict, and this remained part of the espoused *raison d’être* of the ASC, though many faction members were more interested in their own personal gain than any particular ideological stance.

While the factional conflict highlighted here is the most divisive and bitter conflict within the public administration department and the social sciences faculty, it is far from the only one. In a Powerpoint presentation to the Faculty, a senior member of staff outlined his understanding of the divisions facing academic staff. The slide quoted is entitled *Chain of rancour and discord*:

This chain is manifest in the division between

- Perceived supporters of the University Administration and its opponents (those who recently “reconciled” the Administration and others)
- Those who are said to be good ASUU members and those who are not
- Those who supported the incumbent Dean during the last leadership election and those who did not
- Young faculty members and “senior” ones
- Club members and the “clubless” masses of the Faculty<sup>26</sup>
- Those who feel they are denied promotion and their assessors
- Those who get research grants and travel frequently and those who stay home alone
- Those who are liked by their Heads and those who are not, and so on and so forth (Ugorji, 2007).

I would argue that some of the divisions outlined here – notably between supporters of different candidates for Deanship and those who get on with their Heads of Department – are likely to be proxies for the major factional conflict. However, the number of differences outlined, and the rancour they represent, illustrates the level of conflict at the heart of Nigerian higher education.

#### *A note on method*

As discussed in greater detail in the methodology chapter of this thesis, one of the two factions I describe in this chapter, the ASC, was generally made up of people who were sympathetic to me and my research and were happy to discuss their experiences, even those concerning relatively sensitive topics. By contrast, with one exception, the members of the other faction, the select club, were much less open and I found it difficult to gain an ‘insider’ understanding of their views. My difficulty was compounded in the latter part of my stay at USEN when I became concerned that some members of this group were not happy with my research and my presence on campus. Indeed, at this time I was rather concerned for my own safety. As a result of this fear I was extremely reluctant to ask for interviews from certain people and I certainly felt unable to ask them for their views on sensitive topics such as patronage and corruption. Therefore this analysis of factionalism draws heavily on the views of the ASC and other members of academic staff and students, but, with one exception, not members of the select club. However, broader discussions contained in the empirical chapters of this thesis draw on the perspectives of members of factions and those who were not members, plus students and non-academic staff.

The next section outlines the characteristics and personalities of the two main factions. I address the anti-select club first, despite it being in many ways a response to its select club counterpart, because of my superior knowledge of its functioning and personalities.

#### *Anti-select club*

The first of the two main factions in public administration I have called the anti-select club (ASC). The group does not have a name for itself, unlike in factions described by Auyero in Argentina (2000) and Devine in Bangladesh (1999), both of which take the

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<sup>26</sup> This refers to staff who were members of USEN’s Academics’ Club, a social club for senior staff, and those who were not.

name of their leader as the basis for their title. The ASC can be viewed as the modern incarnation of the Marxist faction that began in the 1960s though, as noted above, it has undergone significant change since then. The inception of the current group occurred soon after the inauguration of the current Vice Chancellor in 2005 when the select club went “over the heads of the department” to appoint a Head of Department (HoD) who would “give them leeway” to participate in extra-legal practice (Nnanna Umunna, interview, 3 October 2007). As a result of this, all lecturers who had not been involved in this endeavour were called for a meeting by the VC and “that’s how we became a group” (ibid). The ASC therefore owe their existence to a successful attempt by the select club to install their preferred candidate to the position of HoD.

The ASC is an informal group of academics, mainly in public administration but also in other departments in the social sciences faculty. During my time at USEN the ASC, like the select club, had a clear leader, though other very senior staff were also closely allied to the ASC. These academics, however, did not have an active role in the ASC during my time in Nigeria. The *de facto* leader of the ASC during my time at USEN was a charismatic Marxist scholar named Professor Arinze Okafor, who was also in a position of authority within the faculty. He also has a PhD from a prestigious American university and is an internationally-renowned scholar.

The vast majority of staff members associated with this group espoused an ideology that can be described as socialist or Marxist; as noted above, though the factional conflict no longer concerned this issue, a number of Marxist scholars retained their belief in its ideology. This was a key aspect of the way the group presented itself, to the extent that one prominent member used his inaugural lecture to criticise the select club for their “elitism” and instead promoted “the mass line”. Many of the group were also heavily involved with the trade union for Nigerian academic staff, the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU). However, neither of these two characteristics were prerequisites for membership.<sup>27</sup> A number of ASC members were not active members of ASUU,<sup>28</sup> nor were they adherents to a Marxist ideology. This situation has evolved since the origins of this faction and illustrates the dynamic nature of the factional struggle at USEN.

In addition to a leftist ideology, many members of the ASC saw themselves as guardians of a long-established tradition of scholarship at USEN and within the public administration department. Faction members would often emphasise the ‘traditions’ and ‘culture’ of the department, and how those currently running the department – the select club – are moving the department away from its roots:

This particular department ... has a culture rooted in hard work. So for you to move in from elsewhere and start academic work here ... if you are not too careful in learning and understanding how we function, the tendency that you might bring in some of the practices that are not known here (Wilson Nnaji, interview, 25 July 2007).

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<sup>27</sup> There was no formalised way of joining the ASC. I use the word membership here to refer to a sense of belonging to a like-minded group and participating in their activities.

<sup>28</sup> Every member of academic staff in Nigerian universities is automatically an ASUU member and subscriptions are automatically deducted from salaries. However, there are many staff who are nominal members but actively work against the union in university politics.

Here my informant characterises himself as an academic of long-standing who understands the departmental culture, despite the fact that he is one of the department's newest recruits. He alludes, through the phrase "some practices that are not known here", to extra-legal practices such as sorting and selling handouts that members of the select club engage in. Wilson appears to suggest that those who favour hard work and academic culture are guardians of an old tradition in Nigerian higher education, while the newcomers he refers to are implicitly seen as part of a newer, inferior tradition based on personal gain. The safeguarding of old traditions was presented as one of the ASC's main *raison d'être*.

The ASC in public administration consisted of approximately ten to fifteen people including some postgraduate students whose supervisors were members. The majority of these students did not appear to have any commitment to the group's ideology, but seemed to attend meetings either because they felt compelled to by their supervisor, or because they believed that establishing strong relationships with academic staff could assist them, either while they were still students or afterwards. The group is extremely disparate, with students and staff members having a variety of relationships with other members of the group. Most ASC members – were they able – would assist fellow faction members to achieve promotions and committee memberships, but the line they would not cross was that involving financial corruption, something the select club were known to involve themselves in. It could therefore be argued that, broadly, the ASC represent 'traditional' patron-clientism while the select club represent the newer, more individualistic form of extra-legal practice known as 419. However, as I discuss below, neither the split between the groups nor the distinction between patron-clientism and 419 is as clear-cut as this.

At the time of my research, the ASC were rather marginalised within the public administration department, with members suffering in regularization – the process academics go through to become permanent members of the faculty – promotion and committee membership at the hands of the select club. The main function of the ASC at the time was therefore to forward the interests of its members, such as to ensure that they received regularizations and promotions on time. At the time of my research it was not able to fulfil this function particularly well. Its ability to influence the prevalence of extra-legal practice in the university and to encourage scholarship were also severely hampered by its lack of power within the department.

Despite my close relationship with some anti select-club members, I was still not privy to the internal workings of the group. Indeed, it is quite possible that there was no group working at all, outside bilateral relationships between members, particularly between each member and the leader. One of the main functions of the ASC appeared to be to link each individual with Professor Okafor, a man who, as a senior academic, could have a significant impact on their current and future careers. This corresponds to suggestions in literature (Bujra, 1973: 134; Nicholas, 1977) that factions are more about the relationship between members and the leader than within the faction as a group. This suggestion is also at the root of considerations of factionalism as little more than an aspect of broader patron-client relations (Olivier de Sardan, 2009). The largely bilateral relations within the ASC were very different from the internal organisation of the select club.

### *Select club*

The select club is a group of academic staff at USEN that, in contrast to the ASC, is a semi-official group of which staff can become members. It is much more organised than its opposite number. The club contains members from across the social science faculty, but is particularly dominated by the public administration department. The openly espoused goal of the select club is the acquisition of material wealth, which has recently superseded educational attainment as a marker of social success in Nigeria (Chukwuezi, 2001: 60), and members see themselves as 'select' in these terms, not in terms of academic or intellectual prowess. During my time at USEN the select club was 'in control' of the public administration department, meaning that it had significant influence over decisions on such issues as allocation of resources, staff promotions and committee memberships. A number of factors contributed to this. First, the HoD at the time was a man who, while not a select club member, was nonetheless sympathetic to their aims. A number of my respondents suggested that this was simple opportunism on the HoD's part. Departmental Headships are particularly important roles in Nigerian higher education as the final say over numerous departmental activities rests with the Head. Second, the select club had close links with the Vice Chancellor – a position of unrivalled importance in Nigerian higher education (van den Berghe, 1973) – which substantially improved their ability to act independently: one non-select club member of staff commented that their association with the VC allowed them to "become liberated" from constraints on their action (Professor Charles Ozo, interview, 6 September 2007). Third, the *de facto* leader of the select club was a particularly powerful member of staff who had close ties with the VC independent of his position as leader of the select club. He had previously held important positions in national politics.

A number of my respondents commented that the glue that holds the select club together is their collective participation in extra-legal practices. One of the main functions of the club, therefore, is to protect members from external sanctions on their behaviour. As a result, it was widely believed that the select club in public administration operated on the basis of collective decision-making, in that decisions taken by individuals had to be agreed on by all members. This marks it out as being significantly different from the ASC, which seemed to have no such codes of behaviour. In addition, it was commented to me that the select club are much more exclusionary than the ASC, specifically because of their participation in extra-legal activities.

To join the select club one must be seen as acceptable to current members, meaning that one must have similar attitudes to members about participation in extra-legal practices. New members are usually introduced to the club by an existing member. However, an introduction alone may not be sufficient, as the experience of one of my respondents illustrates. A select club member with whom my respondent was friendly had invited him to one of their meetings – organised to celebrate his acquisition of a 4x4 – in the hope that my respondent might join the club. However, when he arrived at the meeting he found that there was open hostility to his presence and other staff members present, who my respondent said were usually very cordial to him, did not speak up in his defence. He was forced to eat alone outside the meeting, then left. I asked what the meeting had concerned, and was told that the guests were discussing their acquisitions of wealth. He has not been asked to join the select club since. This

respondent has had difficulties throughout his time at USEN, both as a student and a member of staff, because of his unwillingness to support things he does not agree with. My feeling is that the select club regarded him as too independent and therefore untrustworthy. As noted above, unwavering support for the club and collective decision-making is a vital part of the select club ethos.

Like the ASC, but perhaps to an even greater extent, the select club in public administration is dominated by one man. In this case the individual is a very senior staff member with considerable experience in national and local politics. As a result, the benefits accrued by members of the select club are likely to be derived from a combination of closeness to the faction and closeness to the leader. A respondent commented that one of the reasons certain select club members are able to secure promotions is because they are tied “to the apron strings” of their leader.

Despite differences in organisation and goals, the select club performs extremely similar functions for its members to its opposite number, which I discuss in greater detail below. Its primary role is to act as protector of individuals and to ensure that they advance up the academic ladder as quickly and efficiently as possible and gain membership of important departmental and faculty committees, both of which give greater power to the group. During my time at USEN the select club performed this function extremely effectively: of four promotions announced at the departmental board meeting I attended, all were select club members. This is despite the fact that some of these promotions were to grades not yet achieved by other staff members who had considerably longer service in the institution. This is particularly noteworthy as Nigerian bureaucracies have a reputation for promoting people on the basis of “serving time” in an institution, as opposed to merit (Cohen, 1980: 76), so one might therefore expect people with longer service to be promoted more quickly. My research suggests that a number of those promoted were lacking in both time served and merit compared to some of their non-select club colleagues. Departmental committees, particularly lucrative and influential ones, were also dominated by the select club.

#### *Non-faction members*

As noted above, there was just one member of staff in the public administration department who was not a member of either of the two main factions. Chigozie Emerenini presented his situation to me as one of choice, though he was regarded with a degree of derision by some ASC members, and the select club were very keen to stall his attempts at gaining promotion, so it was extremely unlikely he would have been welcomed as a member of either group. In addition, Chigozie was the keenest of all public administration academics to make my acquaintance, something I put down to his isolation within the department. Despite Chigozie’s non-membership of the ASC, he had Professor Arinze Okafor as his patron, which had a significant impact on his career. I discuss Chigozie’s relationship with Prof. Okafor in the *patronage or ‘godfatherism’* section below.

Through my observations of relationships within the public administration department, it was clear that Chigozie did not fit into either of the two groups. He appeared to be very interested in advancing his own position without working particularly hard to achieve it, something that would have naturally put him into the select club camp. During conversations with Chigozie it was clear that he had a broadly anti-colonial, though not

avowedly Marxist, political stance, something which would have allied him more closely to the ASC. My feeling was that he was viewed as rather lazy, something that did not fit with the ASC ethos of the value of academic work.

Chigozie himself was unequivocal about his position within the departmental camp structure: he was a member of neither camp, and did not wish to be, stating that he did not wish to abide by any culture of collective decision-making that existed in the two camps. My analysis suggests that collective decision-making was far stronger in the select club and Chigozie confirmed this when I asked him. Chigozie's rejection of the factional politics of the department and desire to follow his own path was unique in the department, but it is clear that it would have been impossible without the patronage of Prof. Okafor. His academic career was quite unsuccessful – it had taken him two years just to get his post regularized – but it is likely to have been even less successful had he needed to navigate his path alone.

### ***Functions of factions at USEN***

Understanding the nature of the factional struggle at USEN is important to shed light on both the methods individuals use to succeed in Nigerian higher education and the nature of factionalism in Nigerian interface bureaucracy. In the context of this thesis, the most important issue to address is what the existence and operation of factions tells us about the workings of the Nigerian state more generally. Further, the way factionalism operates at USEN enables examination of the usefulness of neopatrimonial state literature in analysing the Nigerian state.

#### ***Anti-select club***

The anti-select club's role can be interpreted in two major ways. The first interpretation, which reflects the stated views of faction members themselves, is that the ASC is a group of scholars working towards bringing the practice of academic life at USEN closer to its official aims: teaching and research. The group prides itself on its work ethic and non-participation in extra-legal practices and actively contrasts itself with the select club. ASC members frequently commented that the reason for their animosity towards the select club was based on these two connected principles: emphasis on scholarship and non-participation in extra-legal practices. This interpretation suggests that in fact there are significant differences between the two factions, based on their vision of how the university should operate. The outcome of the factional struggle will therefore inevitably produce social change as the success of one faction will have significantly different impacts on the workings of the department and, by extension, the university, than the success of the other. This interpretation suggests that much neopatrimonial state literature is flawed, as the conflict at the heart of Nigerian higher education does not concern different groups seeking to take as much from the state as possible (wholesale state privatisation) but rather one group that is seeking to do this and another that aims to bring the university's function closer to its stated aims. It also suggests that, as Friedrich (1968) argues, literature on factions needs to take into account ideology or, in this case, different views on university function, rather than viewing factions as inevitably based on pure self-interest.

The existence of the ASC does not appear to influence the workings of the select club, which continues to act in the same way as before the formation of the ASC. Conversely, the ASC is a reactive organisation, as evidenced by its formation as a response to the

select club. Once again, this could point to differentiation between the two factions: a group of people (the select club) with a particular viewpoint on the way the university should run gain influence and begin to change the way the university runs, so those opposed to this viewpoint (the ASC) organise themselves in opposition. What is of importance is that different attitudes on the way the university should run provide the primary motivation for the formation of the ASC, as opposed to a viewpoint based on self-interest.

The second interpretation of the ASC is that in fact the group does not have any higher motive than simply seeking to gain control of resources for themselves and uses its rhetorical support for 'seriousness' and scholarship, and its leftist political stance, as fronts for self-interest. This would suggest similarities between the ASC and the "problem-solving network" outlined by Auyero (2000) and would also bring it into line with the characteristics of factions outlined by Brumfiel (1994). Pure self-interest was certainly not the motivation ASC members presented to me, but a number of factors suggest that the argument may have some merit. First, the main forum that I attended where the ASC met was a discussion group around issues of interest in African and Nigerian development. The discussions were heavily led by Prof. Okafor, and others – with a couple of exceptions – tended to compete to praise and agree with his views. Indeed, one lecturer sought to complete his leader's sentences at every opportunity. For some members of this group, therefore, the main reason for attending these meetings appeared to be currying favour with the leader as opposed to the forthright exchange of views that is associated with political discussion, which was the ostensible reason for the meetings. It is also notable that the meetings rarely took place when Prof. Okafor was not on campus, further illustrating the fact that many attendees were more interested in pleasing the leader than engaging in serious political discussion.

The attendance of postgraduate students at these discussions is also important. I was able to read a number of papers written by postgraduate students attending this group, and all addressed issues relating to Nigerian development through the prism of a neo-Marxist, dependency-theory-led approach. However, when I discussed these issues with the students they suggested that they were simply following the lead of their academic supervisor and often did not agree with what they were writing or were uninterested in the topic. Furthermore, one student informed me that she attended the meetings because Prof. Okafor was her Masters supervisor and she therefore could not afford to be absent: again, currying favour was more important than scholarship.

A further piece of evidence pointing to the self-interest thesis is the actions of staff at the departmental board meeting I attended. A number of questions were raised at this meeting by ASC members and, despite the widespread existence of exam malpractice, poor facilities and lack of opportunities for research, all questions raised were directly linked to the factional struggle and to personal welfare. These included queries as to why certain members of staff (non-select club members) were excluded from certain responsibilities, particularly those that carried high remuneration, and other issues related to contracts and salaries. This appears to point to a more general pattern of self-interest in the university, in which factions could be seen as simply the best avenue – or, to use Auyero's phrase, the problem-solving network – through which individuals gain access to rewards. It links closely to Olivier de Sardan's (2009: 45) argument that "every-man-for-himself-ism" is rife in Francophone West African bureaucracies. Olivier



de Sardan (2009: 45-46) goes on to comment that as a result of this trend, “[m]eetings involving the collective discussion of measures to improve quality or productivity are extremely rare”. In the case of the public administration department at USEN, departmental board meetings were both rare and predominantly used to advance individual or collective grievances, as opposed to working towards improvement in performance.

My analysis suggests that there are a variety of different reasons people became attached to the ASC. Some were genuinely interested in both scholarship and had a leftist political stance. They were not involved in extra-legal practices and sought to change the way the university was run. These people could be seen to conform to a view of factionalism as a mechanism of social transformation, in that their goals are distinct from that of the opposing faction. However, even for these people it is important to note that, despite their assertions that ideology and commitment to scholarship were crucial motivating factors for faction membership, the support offered by the faction in a hostile environment may be equally important. Contrastingly, there were others for whom membership of the faction and, in particular, building and maintaining a strong relationship with the faction’s leader, were done in the name of self interest alone, such as to improve chances of regularization or promotion, or simply improving relations in case favours needed to be called in at a later date. Often these people had weaker links to the faction as a whole but stronger links to the leader.

#### *Select club*

Analysis of the select club is more difficult for this research than analysis of the ASC, for the simple reason that I spent more time with the other group. However, it is still possible to provide an analysis of the functions of the group through my own observations, conversations with members and those close to the group and the views of others. The function of the select club appears more clear-cut than that of the ASC, because their openly espoused goal is acquisition of material wealth. This, and the activities of the group – participation in extra-legal practice such as lobbying and sorting, promoting members at the expense of better qualified candidates – all point to a *raison d’etre* of personal gain. However, in the Nigerian case, the concept of personal gain requires examination of the world beyond the university, because it could be argued that those who seek to appropriate the state’s resources for themselves are, rather than being purely self-interested, responding to norms that privilege kin and community (the “primordial public”) over the state (the “civic public”). In this way, therefore, the select club are engaging in a form of social transformation towards a social system in which individuals privilege community over the state.

This interpretation requires reference to both pre-colonial Igbo culture, in which notions of individual and community advancement are intertwined (Uchendu, 1965; Njoku, 1990; Smith, 2004; Chukwuezi, 2001), and the colonial period, through the way in which the imposed colonial order made the state the major distributor of resources. In contemporary Igboland individualism is stressed as an important value and if the individual achieves success, this reflects well on the community as a whole. Success is usually measured in material terms. As noted above, support for kin and community in contemporary Nigeria requires both largesse and self-interest: the individual is expected both to assist the community and themselves, through such activities as building a large house in one’s community of origin.

It could therefore be argued that select club members acting in 'self-interest' – and, indeed, also those ASC members who focus on individual gain – are in fact acting for the good of their own community, which will gain both economically through sharing of resources and in status terms through the advancement of one of their members, at the expense of the university. This argument fits very closely with Smith's (2005) comments on the centrality of place of origin in the lives of Igbo people. In this conceptualisation, the community of origin takes precedence over the abstract notion of public interest. This viewpoint is given extra credence by comments made by the leader of the select club to me during my fieldwork, when he argued that place of origin is "paramount" and other realms of belonging in Nigerian society – religion, trades unions, social groups – are "peripheral" (Prof. Chibueze Okoro, interview, 16 April 2007).

Contrastingly, the select club focus on individual wealth acquisition could equally be seen as a manifestation of the values of 419. The key to assessing which one of these interpretations is the correct one lies in understanding what select club members do with their money. Due to the difficulties of conducting research with this group, and my focus on the internal workings of the university, it is difficult to answer this question with certainty. However, my knowledge of the select club leader – who was a chief in his home community and assisted the community by providing money for boreholes and helping to build a bridge – suggests that, in part at least, the 'self-interest' witnessed at USEN is part of an ethos that places the needs of kin and community above the needs of a different 'community', that of the university, its staff and students.

### ***Factionalism: conclusion***

My research suggests that the two factions I have discussed are structurally and functionally similar, though not identical, but have different internal organisations and goals. Structurally, both are dominated by one individual who has a large say over the day-to-day operation of the faction. Individuals who are lower down in the organisational hierarchy are largely wedded to these people in order to 'get on'. However, the select club is much more centralised organisation and has a greater group dynamic than its opposite number. The group is more formalised and takes collective decisions, while the ASC operates as a collective much less.

There is an element of resource acquisition in both camps and there are individuals on both sides of the divide who are simple opportunists, in that they would join any group if it assisted their climb up the social and academic hierarchy. There are also some on the ASC side who combine self-interest with a genuine belief in the official rules and values of the university, in scholarship and non-participation in extra-legal practices. This often accompanies a leftist political stance which, though it no longer forms the basis of the factional split, is still an important aspect of the way some members present themselves. My research suggests that these people are dominant in the ASC and if the ASC gained power within the public administration department, the effect would likely be two-fold: resources and appointments would move towards the ASC, but there would also be a reduction in the acceptability of certain extra-legal practices. I argue that the former is likely to occur because there is a perception amongst ASC members that the select club has advanced the fortunes of its members unfairly during its tenure 'in charge' of the department. The ASC, believing that many of these committee memberships, new appointments and promotions are unwarranted, would

be likely to seek to gain some form of 'payback' on the select club by advancing the interests of their own members. I argue that extra-legal practices would diminish because the ethos of those at the head of the ASC focused clearly on the unacceptability of financially-based extra-legal practice.

On the select club side there are also likely to be differing experiences and opinions within the group. My research suggests that the most common feeling within this group is that their main aim is to increase their own wealth, but that they see this as a legitimate aim in itself. This may be linked to a belief that appropriating state resources to assist the community is justified. It can be argued for many reasons, as outlined in chapter two of this thesis, that societal norms suggest that this kind of behaviour is acceptable. Pressure from outside the university to provide for home communities, belief in ideas of 'in' and 'out' groups, in which the university is outside the realm of the 'primordial public' and thus open to appropriation and the belief that individual and community achievement cannot be separated all point to so-called 'individualism' perhaps being a mask for something different: support for community at the expense of the institution.

In addition, the factions at USEN have different goals and the factional struggle at USEN therefore has the potential to be socially transformative. There may be some elements within the factions that are solely self-interested, but a characterisation of factional struggles as always existing between groups without ideology is contradicted by this evidence, which lends credence to the argument made by Friedrich (1968) that ideology can form an important reason underlying factional conflict. Lastly, these processes illustrate the complexity of social and political life in Nigerian interface bureaucracy, which is unlikely to be adequately analysed using the generalising methods adopted by the neopatrimonial state approach. Instead long-term ethnographic research is necessary (see also Olivier de Sardan, 2009: 40). Patrimonial and informal characteristics exist but, as Olivier de Sardan (2008) comments, they are not, as many neopatrimonial scholars suggest, homogenous.

It is also useful to examine the concept of factionalism within broader debates about Nigerian society, in particular the two types of corruption identified by Smith. The 'select club', one of the two main factions in the public administration department at USEN, is particularly interesting in this regard because its actions combine traditional patron-client relationships with 419. The select club is held together by patron-client relationships, mutual obligation and trust. Much of the ability of more junior select club members to achieve benefits such as promotions and memberships of committees is through their role as clients to the select club leader. In return, they offer loyalty in a crisis. The group are also tied by a collective ethos of participation in extra-legal practice – 419 – which means that each member is obligated to others not to divulge sensitive information about their activities. Traditional patron-clientism therefore underpins participation in 419: it is only because select club members support one another that they are able to continue engaging in corrupt practice. Further, it is very likely that many of the proceeds of this group's activities are used to assist their home communities, which would again be viewed as part of traditional patron-clientism and obligation to kin and therefore, at least by some, not viewed as 419. This example illustrates the complexity and ambiguity of the nexus between extra-legal practice and morality in contemporary Nigeria.

My research suggests that analyses of African bureaucracies need to pay much greater attention to the concept of factions. There are a number of potential reasons why the centrality of factions that I have written about is not present in other analyses of African states. First, it could be argued that the lack of consideration of the topic in other literatures reveals that factions are not an important part of the landscape of African bureaucracy, because if they were, they would have received more attention. Second, it is possible that the conditions in higher education, with its focus – at least in social science departments – on political ideology, and the important role of trades unions, are particularly ripe for the emergence of factions, and they are less prevalent in other arenas. Third, another plausible reason for the prominence of factions in higher education is the sheer size and centralised nature of universities: in smaller or more segmented institutions, factions may be less likely to develop. A final potential reason for the lack of literature on factions is the difficulty of penetrating them for the researcher. Due to the difficulties in conducting empirical research on sensitive issues such as factions, patronage and corruption, very few Africans engage in this sort of research. Those who do carry out research of this type are predominantly western, and often find gaining access and acceptance difficult, as I did. To conclude, given that my empirical research views them as crucial elements of contemporary Nigerian higher education, it is difficult to understand why factions have been so little analysed in literature. One thing that is certain is that more analysis is required.

### **Patronage or ‘godfatherism’**

In the same way as there is significant favouritism of students by academic staff, as outlined in chapter four, grooming is also common between senior and junior academic staff. At USEN the terminology used for the senior member of staff in this relationship is ‘godfather’ or ‘Abraham’, though there did not seem to be a particular term used for the junior member. In academic literature their roles would be described as those of patron and client. There is significant overlap between factionalism and godfatherism, in that senior faction members acted as patrons to more junior members, though both ASC and select club leaders were also patrons to individuals outside their faction. Within the public administration department every academic member of staff who was not a patron appeared to have a strong connection to someone higher up in the departmental hierarchy. Some staff members who were patrons to those below were also clients of those further up the hierarchy.

In some situations godfatherism worked entirely outside the boundaries of the official functioning of the university. An example of this phenomenon is Daniel Amujiri. When I first met Daniel we were invigilating an exam together and he described himself as a lecturer in sociology. Later Daniel explained his background and situation at USEN to me. He had originally been noticed by the man he termed his guarantor as an excellent student during his Masters degree, in which he had finished top of his class. When Daniel had finished his Masters he returned to his non-Igbo home state, from where he was called by his ‘boss’ and asked to come back to USEN to work as his assistant. Daniel described his own work as taking lecturers and tutorials with students and carrying out research on human resources, and he had a large office. His descriptions of his work suggested very clearly that he was a full member of academic staff at USEN.

I discussed the issue of assistants with Daniel, who compared his role as assistant to his patron as a master-servant relationship in the mould of Socrates teaching Plato and Plato Aristotle. He explained that many lecturers would have a favourite student who they would 'groom' through university to eventually be their successor. He described attitude and the ability of the patron to trust him as the most important attribute of an assistant, followed by academic performance. Daniel also had his own assistant, an undergraduate student. Daniel informed me that lecturers liked to be able to spend time away from campus and tell their assistants to take their lectures for them.

Numerous other respondents, plus the official staff list for sociology, revealed that in fact Daniel's suggestion that he was a sociology lecturer was not true. According to other respondents Daniel was nothing more than a postgraduate student who had an extremely close relationship with a senior member of staff in sociology who had installed him in one of his offices and asked him to take some classes for him. Another respondent stated that Daniel was a front for the selling of textbooks by his patron and that the link between the two men was based on their involvement in extra-legal practices. In this case, therefore, both patron and client gained materially from the association.

The importance of a case study such as Daniel is that it illustrates how far a senior member of staff can circumvent official procedures and install his favourite in the university without any formal link between the 'staff member' and the university. Daniel was in a privileged position in terms of access to a large office, which was more than many official staff members received. I do not know whether Daniel, or indeed his undergraduate assistant, actually lectured students, but if they did it would mirror Blundo's (2006: 805) argument about "the inanity of ... formal hierarchies". Blundo comments that there are numerous examples of "undue enhancement of subordinates' roles" in Senegalese bureaucracy, such as "drivers for the departmental court acting as interpreters at hearings; students in the sixth year of medicine writing prescriptions and medical certificates; contractual secretaries playing the role of clerks". The case study of Daniel illustrates both the informality of the division of labour at USEN – such as undergraduate students possibly delivering lectures – and the extent to which influential people can manipulate the system to their own advantage. This point is illustrated by Harrison (2006: 23), who comments that "claims to legitimacy are usually closely tied with ability to exercise authority".

Patronage can also illustrate the extent to which obligation is a key concept in understanding Nigerian society. A staff member whose experience illustrates the importance of mutual obligation is Chigozie Emerenini. As noted above, Chigozie was the only member of academic staff in public administration who was not a faction member, but he did have a very strong patron in Prof. Arinze Okafor. When I first became aware of the relationship between the two men I was surprised, as I had regarded Prof. Okafor as a strong academic and Chigozie as significantly less so. My view, which was supported by others, was that he was someone who had little interest in academic matters and was primarily interested in his own advancement. I later learnt that Prof. Okafor's reason for assisting Chigozie was that he had 'inherited' the role of patron from a patron of his own who he felt obliged to help.

Chigozie had been ‘brought in’ to the department on a temporary contract by a senior academic called Professor Uche Osoagwu. There is some debate over why Prof. Osoagwu chose to bring Chigozie in, with Chigozie himself remarking that Prof. Osoagwu had “seen his papers” and brought him in on that basis. A different respondent, however, remarked that Chigozie was “his townsman with a higher degree, that’s all” (Chizoba Ndukwe, interview, 22 July 2007), suggesting that their community of origin was the most important factor. It is important to note that this interpretation is consistent with a key point made throughout this work: that patronage plays an important role, but the individual concerned first has to achieve the required standard – in this case a Masters degree – before patronage can have an influence. Prof. Osoagwu had been the Masters and PhD supervisor of Prof. Okafor, so when Prof. Osoagwu retired he “handed [Chigozie] over” to Prof. Okafor, who “has taken it upon himself to see about his social climbing” (Chizoba Ndukwe, interview, 3 September 2007). Prof. Okafor clearly felt an obligation to help his patron by taking responsibility for Chigozie, even though Chigozie did not have the characteristics of scholarship or Marxism that might otherwise have made him a good candidate for Prof. Okafor’s patronage. In this case obligation to his patron trumped Prof. Okafor’s sense of loyalty to these more abstract concepts. It is, however, important to recognise that, while Chigozie would not appear to be an ideal candidate for Prof Okafor’s patronage, neither was he a terrible one; had Chigozie has links to the select club, it is unlikely that Prof Okafor would have been able to offer him his assistance.

### ***Motivation for patronage or godfatherism***

For both patrons and clients, engaging in godfatherism has many different motivations. Understanding the motivations of clients is, however, considerably easier, as the benefits are much more tangible. Patrons can assist in achieving initial employment, regularization, promotion, higher qualifications, committee membership and generally make one’s life in the university easier. It was widely expressed amongst my respondents that having a godfather is extremely useful at USEN, though not all my respondents acknowledged having one, or wished to. Chizoba Ndukwe, who is a member of the Religion department and not a faction member, stated that “I would really have liked to have a patron in my department, because if I did then I wouldn’t have had things as difficult as I’m having them” (interview, 3 September 2007), but acknowledged that he didn’t have a patron because having one requires you to “eat shit” (ibid) for them, which Chizoba was not prepared to do. Clearly the position of client involves negatives – such as unswerving loyalty to the patron and being compelled to do their bidding, characterised here as “eating shit” – as well as positives. I also discussed the role of godfathers with Wilson Nnaji, who was sceptical that one could not succeed without a godfather:

And there’s this notion that as a young lecturer if you’re not tied to some established individual ... when you have problem nobody protects you ... but for me that’s arrant nonsense. What problem am I gonna have? There are rules here, and I work by the rules (interview, 30 August 2007).

Wilson did work by the rules, but also, as noted elsewhere in this chapter, he had significant problems: with promotions, his PhD and general relations with others in the department. His statement, which he reinforced by saying that his best avenue to success lay in publishing – using ‘official’ channels – was not borne out by the situation

in the department, in which Wilson had to work very hard to achieve small successes – such as getting his position officially regularized – that came to others – particularly select club members – much more easily. In these cases Wilson had the support of his Dean. As he himself acknowledged, with both Dean and HoD working against him, he would have had great difficulty achieving anything, and may have been forced to leave USEN. My research suggests that the presence of a godfather is of acute importance for those at the lower levels of Nigerian academia. If one does not have a godfather, the next best thing is to remain on the side of other influential people and not attract negative patronage, in which an individual is actively prevented from achieving because they have attracted the ire of more senior colleagues. A junior academic with no godfather and many influential people working against him is virtually consigned to failure.

For the patron, the motivations are more difficult to understand. Literature on patron-client relations (such as Wood and Gough, 2006; Landé, 1977) argues that the relationship is one of inequality, with the patron invariably being the main beneficiary. At USEN, this is not always the case, as clients often gain materially while patrons gain in terms of non-tangible assets such as loyalty and respect, and gain clients who work for them. One of my respondents noted that in Igboland the only time patrons receive materially from their relationship with clients is through gifts at celebrations, though patrons who participate in extra-legal practice may also gain materially through clientelistic relationships. A further benefit is that the patron will be able to raise support if there is an election in which they are standing or a crisis in which they need supporters. But the main motivations are in terms of status: others will know that you are a powerful person if you have many clients doing your bidding. In Nigerian society this status – sometimes termed that of the ‘big man’ – is highly sought after. This notion of the ‘big man’ was first articulated by Sahlins (1963) to describe a powerful “leader-figure” who commands loyalty from a group of acolytes. This usage of the term is still common in contemporary Nigeria.

### **Accessing the University of South Eastern Nigeria for staff**

Academic staff recruitment at USEN is dependent on a combination of factors including qualifications and where they were obtained, connections, ethnicity, political ideology and beliefs about the way the university should run. Each member of staff will utilise a different combination of these “currencies” (Bierschenk, 2008), but my research shows that there are both similarities and differences between the methods of entry of staff and those of students outlined in chapter four. The notion of ‘get to the bridge and I will help you cross it’ is common in academic as well as student entry but, with the scarcity of places for academic staff, a combination of qualification and connections is necessary for all but the very best candidates, such as those with higher qualifications from British or US institutions. If an individual has both the qualifications required to begin an academic career – sometimes nothing more than an undergraduate degree – and people of influence – whether individuals or a faction – supporting his or her application, they are very likely to succeed. For those with one but not the other, gaining a position will be considerably more difficult. Andreski (1979) suggests that the limits to purely kin-based appointments are tiny, but my research suggests that unqualified academics, however well-connected, will not secure employment. Young (1981) argues that, as my research suggests is the case amongst students applying to

USEN, discretion – in Young’s case based on ethnicity – plays a part only amongst those who are formally qualified but not outstanding candidates. He provides an example from his research in Zaire:

[E]thnic preference, conscious or unconscious, can only arise when the relative qualifications of the contenders fall into a gray zone of ambiguity. For example, in Zaire, it would be unimaginable for a candidate armed with a dubious doctorate from Spain or Czechoslovakia to win support over a contender whose thesis, directed by a distinguished Belgian academic, had won a “grande distinction” from Louvain, whatever the respective ethnicity of the aspirants and the voters (Young, 1981: 153).

The same situation exists at USEN. A senior academic with a doctorate from Oxbridge or a prestigious US university would be appointed regardless of other considerations. As Young points out, it is the “gray zone of ambiguity” where influences such as ethnicity and personal connections exert an influence. This gray zone appears larger for staff than for students, reflecting the greater importance of personal connections for academic staff.

A striking attribute of academic appointments to USEN is their informality. Very often an individual – sometimes a postgraduate or ex-student or non-academic member of staff – will be contacted by an academic because there is a vacancy in their department. If the person is qualified and influential people within the department are happy for them to join, they will enter the university. To get around administrative procedures related to advertisements and interviews, new academics will often receive temporary appointments initially, which are ‘regularized’ later, a procedure also noted by van den Berghe (1973) at the University of Ibadan. There is a general belief that recruitment is now much more based on connections than previously, a change that began during the financial crisis and subsequent era of austerity and structural adjustment during the 1980s and depends largely on the attitude of those in positions of authority in departments, faculties and the central university administration. A number of authors (such as Anugwom, 2002; Jega, 1995; Saint et al, 2003) support the view that staff appointments and promotions became more personalised and less meritocratic during this period, particularly as a result of military intervention in university management. As is the case for other aspects of the operation of USEN, there are also senior members of staff who work to the official rules and will only appoint others if they are adequately qualified.

As with student access, there are reasons to believe that sentimental references to the university’s ‘glory days’ may not be wholly accurate. van den Berghe (1973: 255), in his analysis of the University of Ibadan, argues that, while discussions about which candidate to appoint to an academic post concentrate solely on universalistic criteria, “it is obvious that nearly everybody also operates under a multiplicity of particularistic norms involving kinship, ethnicity, sex, clientship, friendship, politics, and a variety of other prejudices that bear no relationship to the candidates ability to perform the job”. This example, from long before the 1980s economic crisis and structural adjustment, bears a striking resemblance to contemporary practices. I have been unable, however, to discover additional literature on access to university for staff in the pre-crisis period that could support or refute this argument.



Among non-academic staff, appointments through connections are extremely common. Very often an important member of academic staff can simply appoint who they wish as their secretary without having to have the appointment scrutinised. Academic staff who engage in extra-legal practices are particularly likely to want someone they trust as their secretary rather than a stranger. My research suggests that the appointment of non-academic staff through connections has increased markedly since the beginning of the current university administration. This reflects a point made earlier that the incoming VC was keen to employ people from the state where the university is situated – his home state – and, more particularly, his home community. My knowledge of non-academic recruitment is significantly less detailed than that of academic staff, however, primarily because these staff, as lower-ranking and therefore significantly less powerful than their academic colleagues, would be less likely to reveal anything that diverged from the written policy to an outsider researcher.

During the Cold War period political ideology played a part in academic recruitment, especially in social science departments. A senior member of staff in the public administration department told me that in the 1980s academic staff would be appointed on the basis of two criteria: whether they were, first, a good scholar, and second, a Marxist. This was partly because the HoD at the time wished to guide the department along ideological lines. However, the importance of political ideology in recruitment has declined markedly since the end of the Cold War, and did not seem to play any role at all during my time at USEN. This may, however, be influenced by the fact that those in control of the public administration department – and, by extension, appointments of academics – are the select club, who are far less ideologically-minded than their ASC counterparts. Individuals are now much more likely to be judged on their loyalty to a particular faction and how they believe the university, rather than the country as a whole, should be run.

Recruitment of particular individuals has the potential to intensify departmental conflict, as the case of Wilson Nnaji reveals. Wilson was lecturing at a different, much less prestigious university and was registered for his PhD at USEN, where he had also completed his BSc and Masters. He was approached by the public administration department at USEN to teach part-time. At the time the department was headed by a member of staff who was known to be hostile to the select club and a close associate of the ASC. During the period that Wilson was teaching part-time, two members of the select club were suspended for unethical practice. The circumstances of the suspension of one member of staff are unknown to me, but the second was suspended for asking a student for ₦50,000 (approximately £200) to approve a PhD thesis. When Wilson entered the department he was given the courses of one of the suspended lecturers to teach. The attitude of other select club members in the department was that Wilson had “come to replace their friend” (Wilson Nnaji, interview, 30 August 2007), resulting in a large amount of hostility being directed towards Wilson. In addition, these people believed that, as Wilson had been brought into the department by the previous, ASC regime, he must be loyal to them. This point provoked some debate amongst my respondents, Wilson himself suggesting that he was not ‘brought in’ because of already-existing links to the ASC or to individual members of the group and some other respondents suggesting that this was in fact the case.

Whatever the reasons behind Wilson's entry into USEN, he is now firmly associated with the ASC. This has had negative implications for his academic career. Wilson originally came in on a temporary contract and so had to go through regularization to get a formal academic post. However, soon after his original appointment the departmental leadership changed hands with the new select club leadership being much less sympathetic to Wilson than the previous one. Wilson's regularization was 'sat on' by a senior member of staff to ensure it was not completed. This staff member once described Wilson and a close friend of his to me as "insulting specimens". Eventually his regularization was only completed with the intervention of the Faculty Dean Prof. Arinze Okafor, the ASC leader.

An example of the way negative patronage can work in recruitment is in the appointment of Chizoba Ndukwe as an academic member of staff. There was a vacancy for a member of academic staff in Chizoba's department and many other members of staff had their own 'client' candidates lined up to assume the post. Chizoba did not have a patron, though he had previously had contact with very senior members of the university administration and went to ask for their help. However, these staff members did not want to get involved in a departmental matter. The HoD would have the final say as to who was appointed and at the time the Head was a non-Igbo who had been marginalised within the department for a long time. Chizoba did not have a strong relationship with the HoD but was still brought in to spite the other members of staff who had marginalised him for so long. Chizoba did not become the client of the man who had 'brought him in' because the main motivation was to pay other senior staff back for marginalising him, rather than installing his own client in the department. In this case not having a patron had actively worked in Chizoba's favour because all the patrons in the department were people that the HoD wished to thwart. It also illustrates the level to which personal animosity can influence decision-making.

### ***Ethnicity and religion***

Ethnicity is a further important factor in gaining entry to USEN as a member of staff. Large numbers of USEN employees, despite the university's status as a federal institution, see USEN as an Igbo institution, run by and for that ethnic group. When examining the influence of ethnicity it is also important to take into account intra-ethnic affiliations, particularly state- and locality-based loyalties, and their impact on entry. This is clearly a product of the overwhelming Igbo dominance of the university, and reflects the argument made by Young (1981: 149) about the University of Ibadan, where "with three-quarters of both staff and students Yoruba, factional conflict tended to revolve around Yoruba subgroups" (see van den Berghe, 1973: 97-98 for a similar argument).

During my time at USEN I was able to examine the staff lists in the faculties of social sciences and pharmaceutical sciences, and in those two faculties, out of a total of 181 academic staff, there were only seven – including myself – who were not Igbo, just 4% of the total. Of these, two were from other West African countries, leaving just four non-Igbo Nigerians, or 2%, in these two faculties. This fact does not necessarily mean that non-Igbos are excluded from gaining employment at USEN – it could equally mean that they don't apply – but strongly suggests some bias in recruitment. In addition, shortly after I arrived at USEN I asked a colleague if it would be acceptable to address colleagues or students in Igbo and was told that this would be fine, indicating the

primacy of the language at the university. Other non-Igbos I spoke with said that the widespread use of Igbo language on campus acted to exclude them.

Many of my respondents acknowledged that Igbo ethnicity is an important factor when it comes to gaining employment. This occurs for two main reasons: first, many staff members wish to retain the Igbo identity of the institution and are therefore reluctant to appoint non-Igbos. Second, as so many appointments take place through recommendations and connections, it is unsurprising that those currently in positions of influence – overwhelmingly Igbo – will seek to bring in other Igbos, particularly those from their states, LGAs and communities of origin. The current university administration is known for appointing staff based on their state of origin, specifically that they come from the state in which the university is based, which is also the state of origin of the current VC. There has also been an upsurge in numbers of staff coming directly from the VC's home community. One of the main reasons for this is that if there is an internal crisis – common in Nigerian universities – those from the VC's home community that he has brought in will support him. There is also evidence from my research that the VC attempted to appoint on the basis of merit at first, before becoming more connection and kin-based as his administration progressed. This would appear to indicate a desire on the part of the VC to play by the official rules early in his tenure, which gradually gave way to pressure from kin and community as time passed.

My research suggests that the ethnic nature of USEN has been increasing for some time. One respondent told me that in the 1960s, 70s and 80s there were many more non-Igbos at USEN, including Vice Chancellors. This person informed me that it would not now be possible to have a non-Igbo VC, and that recruitment has been distorted to favour the well-connected and those who are loyal to influential people. Loyalty in recruitment has become “a new tradition” (Prof. Charles Ozo, interview, 6 September 2007). As the vast majority of staff at USEN are Igbo, ‘loyalty’ as a method of recruitment is likely to further increase the proportion of Igbo members of staff.

Religion also has an impact on staff recruitment, with some influential staff members giving preference to those with whom they worship. Links are stronger within congregations or denominations – Anglicans appointing fellow Anglicans, for instance, or individuals only appointing others who are born-again Christians. Some members of staff have a particular reputation for appointing and promoting members of certain denominations and holding back the promotions of others who did not share their faith. Given the dominance of Christianity in Igboland, simply being Christian is not likely to be enough to influence recruitment or promotion. This pattern of increasing fragmentation is therefore common to both ethnicity and religion, in an institution in which Igbo ethnicity and Christian religion are both clearly dominant.

### **Succeeding at the University of South Eastern Nigeria for staff**

Once an individual has been accepted to work as an academic at USEN, the influence of personal connections becomes even more acute. My research suggests that, of the four processes I have examined – access and success for staff and students – this is the most governed by personal connections. In this section I will examine how academic staff gain promotions and access to other benefits that can have a significant impact on their careers.

### **Promotions**

In all higher education systems, as at USEN, promotion up the academic ladder is dependent on a variety of official criteria. Promotions bring with them significant status and financially-based rewards. However, at USEN they are a site of extreme contestation between different groups within the university and are used by the powerful to advance the interests of those they favour and stifle the ambitions of those they are hostile to. Olivier de Sardan (2009: 44) outlines this process well, referring to Francophone African bureaucracies: “[a]ppointments, assignments, promotions and ‘sidelining’ follow the rather systematic logics of networks, individualised protection and redistribution which really have very little to do with officially designated job profiles and skills”. In the case of USEN, this could not be absolute – someone without a degree could not be awarded a job – but, once inside the university, allocation of positions, committee memberships and other benefits were decided largely on the basis of personal loyalties.

There are clearly-set rules regarding promotions, but those in positions of influence nonetheless use numerous methods to either assist or thwart promotion efforts. During my time at USEN I came across a number of staff members who believed that their advance up the academic ladder had been ‘frustrated’, in some cases for many years. Promotions are officially subject to the rules set out in the university’s ‘yellow book’ and candidates for promotion must fill out form ASAP/1, Academic Staff Assessment/Appraisal Form. The criteria used to judge suitability for promotion are length of service, academic qualifications, publications, teaching and professional experience, and conference attendance (USEN form ASAP/1, undated), and promotions are on a points-based system. However, a key issue with regard to promotions at USEN is the huge scope for different interpretations of the criteria set out in ASAP/1.

Publications are a particularly contested site. According to ASAP/1, books, book chapters and journal articles each receive points depending on the quality of the publication. Journals are assessed on their ‘impact factor’, with higher value journals attracting higher points, up to a maximum of five points for an ‘A’ journal such as *Millennium* and the *Journal of Modern African Studies*. However, some in the public administration department have sought to manipulate this process in order to ensure that local journals owned by their members were categorised as high impact. In this case the journal’s owner would then encourage his friends and members of his faction to submit articles to this journal, which he would publish whatever their quality, a practice that is well known in Nigeria (Olukoju, 2002). A number of my respondents remarked on the low quality of some locally-produced publications, but the most important point to note is that the academic quality of publications was given far lower priority than the influence it could have in securing promotion.

However, as with most types of patronage at USEN, where there are winners there are also losers. A useful case study of thwarted ambition is that of Prof. Emenike Esonwanne. Prof. Esonwanne was a brilliant scholar who had finished top in national examinations and had been recommended by the HoD at his American *alma mater* as the best student ever to attend that department. However, Prof. Esonwanne returned to Nigeria from the US as what he described as a “radical”, a perspective that was not well received within USEN. In Prof. Esonwanne’s case, this meant he was politically

left-wing and a strong trade unionist, something that brought him into conflict with “established interest” within the university (Prof. Emenike Esonwanne, interview, 27 June 2007).

A number of different methods were adopted to prevent Prof. Esonwanne gaining a variety of different promotions. In an attempt to get promoted to the rank of Reader, many of his publications were not sent to the external assessor. For a later promotion attempt the faculty did not send any papers at all to the external assessor. His file and forms went missing within the department and he was accused of trying to send the assessor an additional paper in order to improve his chances. Deans of Prof. Esonwanne’s faculty refused to sign forms that would have assisted his chances of promotion. Assessment of his publications were also manipulated so that, for instance, when a publication was supposed to score five he was awarded three or if he was supposed to be awarded fifteen he would receive ten.

Prof. Esonwanne was awarded enough points to be promoted to Reader, but not Professor, a title of great significance and one to which Prof. Esonwanne believed he was entitled. Eventually the university agreed with this and he gained his Professorship, having submitted his papers four times and after a wait of seventeen years from his original application. The final decision was made, according to Prof. Esonwanne, because the university was ashamed at the length of time it had taken to approve the Professorship. This suggestion is similar to evidence relating to legal and extra-legal processes across USEN: rules may be manipulated up to a point – the moral boundary, beyond which it is viewed as unacceptable to go – but the formal, written policy will, once the informality reaches a certain stage, act the rein it in.

Another of my respondents was advised that merit can influence decision-making if a particular situation goes beyond what is considered acceptable. Wilson Nnaji, who had difficulties in advancing academically due to poor personal relationships with those in power in the department, was advised by a senior member of staff to eliminate bias by using academic means:

[My colleague] said what you need now is to write and publish ... if you publish and people want to [frustrate] you there is a limit to how far they can do it. If every year they see at least one or two more articles in your appraisal, over the years, they will transform the hatred they have for you to respect (interview, 30 August 2007).

Following my research, I would cast doubt on the plausibility of this statement. It appears much more likely that Wilson’s attempts to get around his problems through using official channels would be frustrated by those who were averse to him achieving any success. For top-rank academics in Nigeria, success through these formal mechanisms may be achievable, though first getting to the position of a strong academic may require either the use of personal connections, qualifications from a high-ranking foreign institution or both. For young, inexperienced academics battling against numerous enemies in their own institutions, it is highly unlikely. As a result, promotions are not always, or even usually, reserved for the most meritorious staff.

Another problematic issue with regard to promotions is that of Professorships. Achieving the rank of Professor is viewed as the pinnacle of achievement, and once this title is attained most Professors simply cease conducting academic work. Olukoju

(2002) notes that allegations of this type have been made against scholars across Nigeria's universities. Instead, Professors are more likely to concentrate on gaining more important, influential positions within the university – HoD, Dean – but cease teaching and research. For a large number of staff members, therefore, promotions are a means to an end – greater power and influence within the university hierarchy.

There may also be an element of reciprocity involved in promotions. As noted elsewhere, both staff members and students who 'have people' are at a distinct advantage in accessing rewards. Pressure may be brought to bear on behalf of others to ensure that these rewards are realised. An example of this, which also illustrates the complexity of ties of obligation, concerns my informant Chizoba Ndukwe. Chizoba caught a girl cheating in an exam and marked on her paper, meaning that she would either fail or face a significant mark deduction. However, the girl's mother works at USEN, and is friends with both the Professor whose office is next door to Chizoba and a senior typist in his department. The Professor is also friends with a different Professor who, at the time of the interview, would shortly be on a panel assessing Chizoba's suitability for promotion. This Professor gave Chizoba a 'sneak preview' into his assessment, which suggested that he had the score to be made a Lecturer 1, but due to issues around tenure and length of service he is only likely to be made a Lecturer 2. The Professor gave Chizoba the impression that he is protecting him at the assessment panel and that, in return, Chizoba should pardon the girl he had previously caught cheating. For senior staff, therefore, rewards such as promotions can be used as bargaining chips in order to convince others to do their bidding. Merit is largely ignored.

The ability to take advantage of the formal rules may also be dependent on the individual's social networks. To illustrate I turn again to the example of Prof. Esonwanne. An influential man in national circles, in direct contrast to his low standing amongst the powerful at USEN, Prof. Esonwanne was able to assist two colleagues who he believed had been unfairly treated by the USEN hierarchy. In both cases he succeeded in getting these men employed or reinstated to their positions. However, in order to do so he called in very high-level favours within the national government. In this case enforcing the correct procedure was only possible through patronage, and had Prof. Esonwanne not had these links it is very likely his colleagues would have continued to be marginalised.

Appointments to very senior positions such as those of Dean and HoD can be even more rancorous than routine academic promotions, due to their seniority and influence. This is particularly the case for Deans of Faculty because they are voted upon by academic staff rather than appointed. An example illustrating the fractious nature of relations within the social science faculty is the 2006 election to the faculty Deanship. This election was contested by three candidates, two of whom could be seen as representing the two main factions described in detail above, and the third who can be viewed as the 'compromise' candidate, in that he was affiliated to neither faction. In their campaign literature all three candidates combined arguments about their visions for the future of the faculty with extreme criticism of the other candidates that drew heavily on local morality. The two faction-based candidates criticised one another on the basis of, for example, intimidation, spying, threatening foreign academics with deportation, lack of respect for Igbo elders, using theft and other 'devilish devices' and

of representing the 'forces of darkness' against the 'forces of light'. The compromise candidate, meanwhile, admonished the other two candidates for this factionalism:

We are all aware of the dirty politicking, destructive name-calling, exchange of personal abuses and fireworks and intimidation in canvassing for votes without any sense of decorum etc. that have been going on in the Faculty between the two Public Administration factions since the Deanship race began. We are also well aware of the potentials of this kind of set-up to overheat the Faculty and jeopardize academic progress. We are equally aware that had the two Public Administration factions closed ranks and presented a single candidate for the Deanship race, that would have been more mature. *But no!* Because of their over-bloated egos, and greed for power, because of their belief that they have the rest of the academic staff of the Faculty under their thumbs or inside their pockets, the two Public Administration factions have embarked on an internecine political warfare (Prof. JB Okolo, 2006, 1, original emphasis).

In the election itself, the candidate closely associated with the ASC was victorious. There are a number of potential reasons for this, including the anti-ASUU stance of the select club candidate and the belief amongst non-select club members that, had the select club candidate won, the Deanship would have been used to satisfy the needs of this group rather than the faculty. There was, therefore, a perception that the select club candidate was more likely to use political office for personal gain. This reflects my conclusion, outlined above, that the select club are more exclusionary and more interested in material gain than their ASC counterparts.

### ***PhD supervision***

A PhD is viewed as an extremely important aspect of an academic career in Nigeria, both in terms of prestige and as an important criterion for promotion. There is no requirement that academic staff receive PhDs before embarking on their career and for this reason many academic staff undertake PhDs while simultaneously having academic posts. Indeed, some reach the title of Reader or Professor without having completed a PhD. However, actually receiving a PhD can be difficult if you are either a member of a group that is outside power in your department or you are assigned to a PhD supervisor with whom you have a conflict of interest.

Nnanna Umunna is an example of an academic whose ambitions for a PhD were thwarted as a result of his supervision. Nnanna is an ASC member and is known as having particularly bad relationships with the select club. This first came to my notice during a departmental board meeting which had descended into little more than a slanging match between Nnanna and some select club members. I was later told that this confrontation was relatively mild by the standards of the department, but illustrated to me the depth of animosity between the two groups, and particularly between Nnanna and the select club. Nnanna's original PhD supervisor had moved away from Nigeria and he had been placed under the supervision of a member of staff with whom he had a number of disagreements. He told me that if you have a good rapport with your supervisor things can work well, but as he has had so many disagreements with his supervisor this was not possible. Nnanna intends to register for a PhD at a different university.

Wilson Nnaji is another member of staff who has experienced difficulty in getting his PhD. Wilson is currently registered for a PhD in local government but was informed by other members of staff in the department that he is not allowed to do this PhD as his Masters degree is in public administration and he must therefore repeat his Masters. Wilson later discovered that this rule had been 'cooked up' within the department to frustrate him. Wilson informed me that PhD supervision is intensely political and that if the student is not liked or is not loyal to the supervisor's group, they simply will not get their PhD. Indeed, he told me that members of the select club in the department had said that they "wouldn't live to see [him] get [his] PhD from the department" (interview, 30 August 2007). Wilson is now searching for a scholarship to study for a PhD outside Nigeria. These two cases illustrate the huge importance of closeness to the dominant group in the department and the potential consequences that can arise from attracting the negative patronage of the dominant group.

### ***Other benefits***

USEN academics have the opportunity to contribute to the academic life of the department and faculty through committees. Committee Chairmanships and memberships are also beneficial when seeking promotions – they appear on form ASAP/1 that is used to assess suitability for promotion – and are used by some staff members to divert departmental funds to individuals. Committee membership is another arena in which those in charge of appointments can favour members of their faction. In the public administration department, non- and anti-select club members were excluded from influential committees with remits covering financial matters, appointments and promotions, all of which could be used to advance the interests of the select club, who dominated these committees. During my time at USEN only one committee, the environmental committee, was headed by a non-select club member. The environmental committee's main remit concerns litter, an extremely marginal issue. When I related this fact to a respondent, he commented that whoever allocated committee memberships was playing a joke at the ASC's expense by allocating them a committee concerning rubbish. Wilson Nnaji, an ASC member, assured me he was happy to be outside those committees with financial remits because were he to be a member he may end up being ethically compromised by other members by being coerced into extra-legal practices.

Another area that is influenced by patronage and factionalism is allocation of courses to academics. As noted above, "juicy" (Blundo, 2006: 86), heavily subscribed courses were more likely to be allocated to select club members, who could use them to acquire wealth through selling handouts or through students sorting them. ASC members were often unhappy with course allocation because it was not done on the basis of specialism but other factors. There appeared to be a concerted effort on the part of select club members to retain the courses they wanted to teach and foist others on non-select club members, regardless of their ability to teach these courses. Nnanna Umunna, a prominent ASC member, told me that, by forcing courses on unqualified members of staff, those in charge "want to humiliate you" (Nnanna Umunna, interview, 3 October 2007). This practice appears similar to appointments in Niger remarked upon by Olivier de Sardan (2009: 45), where some job allocations were "like giving a car to someone who has no driving licence".



## Scholarship

As noted in chapter four, a large number of my respondents were concerned about the numbers of students entering USEN without any interest in the subject they were studying or in academic pursuit of any kind. This pattern was also evident in discussions about academic staff: there was a widespread perception – including from me – that many people sought employment at USEN only for the financial and status rewards on offer. There is nothing particularly abnormal in this – higher education is an arena of high financial and status rewards the world over and these factors undoubtedly form part of the motivation for many academics. But what is particularly interesting in the case of USEN is that, first, many academics were seen as not only indifferent but actively hostile to academic pursuit, and second, the majority of academics perceived to be non- or anti-intellectuals appeared to belong to one faction, the select club.

USEN is acknowledged as one of Nigeria's foremost educational establishments and is one of the elite group of federal universities. However, I found its day-to-day operation remarkably similar to those I experienced while working at a small, newly-founded state university in 2000-1 in that it was disorganised, chaotic and few members of staff seemed genuinely interested in teaching students or carrying out research. It is acknowledged by many staff at USEN that there are two types of lecturer: the first group are termed academics, serious or upright. These individuals are primarily interested in gaining employment in the higher education sector because they have an interest in their subject, though the financial and status rewards clearly also play a part. They are unlikely to participate in extra-legal practices, though some may assist kin or friends to enter the university as long as it does not involve financial corruption. They are highly unlikely to participate in extra-legal practices related to their own teaching such as accepting money to sort courses. Being an intellectual, however, does not confer status on the individual. Indeed, as one respondent told me, telling someone they are an intellectual at USEN is like telling them they are an idiot, because the primary goal is seen as making money "by hook or by crook" (Dr Christopher Nwangwu, interview, 18 June 2007). A different respondent told me that conferences in public administration used to be highly prestigious and places were highly sought after, but now colleagues "gleefully tell you they have not attended a conference in ten years" (Professor Arinze Okafor, interview, 26 September 2007).

The second group are known as non-academics, anti-academics, anti-intellectuals or traders. These people enter university primarily for the status and financial gains that accompany it. As noted elsewhere, university lecturer, particularly in a prestigious federal university, is an extremely high-status occupation. An individual's standing in his or her home community is likely to be increased considerably if he or she is a lecturer, status that can be increased further if the individual is able to secure benefits such as entry to the university, as either staff or student, for community members. In addition, in line with comments made about the linkages between individual and community status enhancement (such as Uchendu, 1965), the home communities of academic staff will also gain, as other communities will know that x community is the home of someone who has made good in the academic world. The financial rewards may also be great, particularly if the individual engages in extra-legal practices – as this group are highly likely to – which can be extremely lucrative.

The term trader was often used because these individuals treated what they had to offer – high grades – as commodities to be sold to the highest bidder. Ekwunife (1995, cited in Gbenga, 2002: 201) comments that this kind of behaviour amongst higher education staff is common, and that higher education has as a consequence “been eroded by corruption at all levels, duplicity, insincerity and lack of commitment”. One of my respondents, Wilson Nnaji, divided the academic body into three rather than two, arguing that what others had termed the non-academic group should be further split into two. He termed the first of these two groups “meal ticket lecturers”. These are individuals who may not be corrupt but will not speak out if something unjust takes place because their primary aim is to hold on to their jobs. The second non-academic group Wilson described as those who entered the university “to conquer [their own] poverty”. These people see students as their clientele, from whom they extort money.

A number of my respondents suggested that non-academics are rising in number and now form a majority, at least in the public administration department. This finding is mirrored by Anugwom’s (2002: 150) perspective on change in the Nigerian higher education system:

[T]here indeed has been a marked decline in the quality of university faculties that is a product both of the incentive system and, more crucially, the transformation of universities into refuges where all shades of persons can conveniently seek some sort of shelter from economic privation. Many say that the ethical standards of members have nose-dived, with a kind of cash-and-carry mentality of pure self-interest now prevailing.

My research suggests that, while Anugwom’s view has a good deal of credibility in USEN’s social sciences faculty, the balance between academics and non-academics is likely to be more in favour of academics in the science faculties. This is because a considerably larger body of knowledge and, therefore, hard work is required to be a competent scientist than a competent social scientist. Non-academically minded students are therefore more likely to favour the easier route into lecturing positions in social sciences and arts subjects. Anecdotal evidence from the university suggests that the social sciences faculty was particularly viewed as an arena of non-academic values. It is possible that this trend also has its origins in the military era, as Olukoju (2002: 3) has suggested that non-science subjects were marginalised during this period as they were “not considered directly relevant to the nation’s quest for technological development”. High-quality academics therefore gravitated towards the sciences.

As noted above, the majority of my respondents were among the academics group. This was because, in the majority of cases, lack of interest in academic pursuit and participation in extra-legal practices went hand-in-hand; those who were of this type were less likely to want to discuss their feelings and experiences with me because discussing one’s own participation in extra-legal practices with an outsider was generally deemed unacceptable. In addition I found that I had a greater affinity with those of an academic bent as discussion of subjects of interest to me, such as African and Nigerian politics and development and Nigerian higher education, was both easy and interesting with many of this group. Those I would place in the non-academic category appeared much less enthusiastic about discussing these issues with me,

though this may also have been due to a more general antipathy to my presence in the university.

It is also notable that the vast majority of those who were interested in scholarship were reaching the ends of the academic careers, and therefore studied and began their careers when academic considerations were more important. The declining number of individuals interested in scholarship is likely to reflect the fact that – as noted elsewhere – it is extremely difficult to ‘get on’ in Nigerian higher education in the twenty-first century without ‘playing the (extra-legal) game’, whereas in years past this was not the case. This point was made very clearly to me by Professor Charles Ozo, a senior member of staff, who told me that when he was applying to work at USEN in the 1960s if a student wanted to be taken on as a Graduate Assistant, the bottom rung of the academic ladder, they had to be the best in their class. This directly contradicts van den Berghe’s (1973) argument that recruitment was based on far more than just merit.

The change in recruitment practices towards “loyalty” (Professor Charles Ozo, interview, 6 September 2007) suggests that there has been a significant change in the values of the institution, away from norms valuing academic excellence and hard work and towards those privileging personal connections. Professor Ozo’s remarks are supported by a number of scholars (Eribo, 2002; Amuwo, 2002) who argue that the anti-intellectualism of the Babangida and Abacha dictatorships had a direct impact on falling standards in higher education. For Eribo, military interference in academic issues stifled academic freedom and caused an exodus of senior academics abroad. It could be argued that the latter paved the way for less committed academics to take their places. Anugwom (2002) argues that one reason for the falling quality of the new intake of lecturers is the energy academics needed to consume fighting military intervention in higher education. These arguments add weight to the thesis that posits the 1980s as a period of great decline in Nigerian higher education. The weight of evidence supports the decline thesis, though suggestions that the ‘glory days’ of Nigerian higher education were without rancour and discord seem equally wide of the mark.

As noted above, success at USEN in terms of, *inter alia*, promotions and completion of doctoral studies is extremely difficult to achieve without assistance from a faction or godfather, while academic considerations matter much less. This can be illustrated through case studies of two members of staff I knew well during my time at USEN, one of whom was extremely adept at ‘playing the game’ and the other who was deficient in these skills. One of these two men could be termed an academic, the other was undoubtedly not.

During my time at USEN Dr. Christopher Nwangwu held the rank of Lecturer 2. Prior to working at the university Christopher had been a successful writer who took a pay cut to accept his academic post. When Christopher was accepted to work at USEN in 1999 – he did not apply for a job but was ‘brought in’ by a senior member of staff – he was originally supposed to begin as Lecturer 1 due to his publications list. However, due to ‘politics’ – Christopher did not elaborate further what he meant by this – and because he only had a Masters degree and no PhD, he was given the rank of Assistant Lecturer. Since then he has moved up one rank, to Lecturer 2, but no further, despite having completed a PhD and having an extensive list of publications.

Christopher could, possibly more than any of my other respondents, be described as both an academic and an outsider. When explaining his situation to me he would often state that his primary goal was to teach his students and conduct his research, and that promotions were useful but that he was not really bothered whether he got one or not. When I discussed my research with Christopher I often had difficulty getting him to explain his feelings and experiences without him linking them directly to a theoretical and conceptual understanding of his own discipline, sociology. In discussions with another respondent we agreed that Christopher, more than anyone else I met, could really be described as a scholar. In addition, Christopher was adamant that he would not involve himself in anything that went against the explicit rules of the institution, even to help his own children, something that is extremely rare at USEN and in Nigerian society more generally. He was also scornful of those who work at USEN and do not work towards the stated goals of the institution and noted that the anti-academic strain at USEN was pan-Nigerian.

Christopher was not linked – at least to my knowledge – to any faction, nor did he have any ‘godfather’ figure assisting him in his academic career. He was regarded by many fellow academic staff as, to use his term, “a crackpot”, due to his insistence on enforcing the rules of USEN and his concentration not on the local politics of the institution but on his teaching and research. His “crackpot” status was also heightened by the fact that he did not invest time on putting on a show of his wealth and status: he dressed modestly and drove an old, rusting car. This is in direct contrast to most lecturers, many of whom drove the newest 4x4s or that most Nigerian of luxury vehicles, the Mercedes Benz. Indeed, the importance of the car as status symbol in Nigerian and particularly Igbo society has been noted elsewhere, not least in Nkem Nwankwo’s (1975) novel *My Mercedes is Bigger than Yours*.

Chinedu Obi was very different to Christopher. They are of approximately the same age, though Chinedu was much more successful in terms of rank, having been, at the time I left USEN, a Senior Lecturer who was going through the process of being assessed for promotion to Professor. Despite his high rank, Chinedu did not appear to spend any time on research and, indeed, I was informed by another respondent that he was too busy for this. He spent a great deal of time in a self-run library within the university campus that, I was informed, he funded through contributions from donors, a proportion of which Chinedu would take for himself. Chinedu was a senior member of the select club and, in contrast to Christopher, was extremely well-respected by other academics. He was much closer to the norm of achievement in Igbo society than Christopher, always dressing extremely smartly and driving a new 4x4.

The ease with which these two men advanced up the USEN hierarchy differed greatly, the ‘non-academic’ advancing much more quickly than his ‘academic’ counterpart. Chinedu clearly had far greater support amongst those people who could influence promotion and, indeed, his promotion to the rank of Professor was to be assessed by two close colleagues in whose best interests it would be to recommend his promotion. Christopher, by contrast, had little support within influential circles and was often marginalised, such as when he was asked to take over the editorship of an internal newsletter, a job that few USEN academics would be interested in. His ability to gain promotion was not enhanced by his apparent belief that promotions should come automatically: at USEN, the academic must apply to be promoted and if he or she does

not fill the forms in on time the promotion will not be offered. As with other aspects of procedure, however, the speed at which an application is processed owes a great deal to the person applying and his or her influential connections.

The contrast between Christopher and Chinedu illustrates the primacy of personal connections over scholarship in achieving success at USEN. The insider with connections but a lack of interest in academic work will invariably succeed more quickly and more comprehensively than his or her counterpart who is academically-minded but does not 'play the game.' In addition to (and also because of) his success, the Chinedus at USEN will also receive more respect from students than the Christophers, illustrating the near-universality of norms that place value in status and material wealth over academic achievement.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has outlined the conflicts at the heart of day-to-day life in Nigerian higher education, which exert a huge influence on the careers of Nigerian academics. These conflicts between individuals exert a significant influence on the functioning of the university and often divert resources, both human and financial, away from student teaching and research. The most pervasive conflicts exist between semi-formal groups I have described as factions, which seek to advance the interests of their members at the expense of others. However, the competition between factions at USEN is not as simple as the sort of factional conflict outlined by Brumfiel (1994) – competition for resources between structurally and functionally similar groups. There are differences in ethos between the two groups, particularly in their different attitudes to both scholarship and the acceptability of extra-legal practice. There is also a degree of self-interest in both groups, but to suggest that the camps at USEN are identical groups competing for resources would be incorrect.

What my research also shows is that arguments suggesting that every Nigerian knows 'the unofficial rules of the game', that these rules are accepted by all and that everyone works within them are wide of the mark. In fact, there is an ongoing conflict within higher education in Nigeria between those who represent the 'official' and 'unofficial' rules of the game, though within these categories there is also a significant degree of differentiation. Each individual is likely to have his or her own ethical code outlining what he or she will and will not do, ranging from the most 'strict', such as Dr Christopher Nwangwu, who will not even assist his own children to gain a place at university, to lecturers at the other end of the scale who will sell places at university, grades, handouts and practically anything else in order to make money. These ethical codes are constantly changing and reforming, and are influenced factors both inside and outside the university.

One striking characteristic I noted is the increasing prevalence of people in the latter, 'trader' category, particularly among younger lecturers. Wilson Nnaji, for instance, was extremely concerned that in the future, when the older ASC members have retired, he may be the only non-select club member in the department. My research suggests that the university is moving towards a future where factionalism, godfatherism and other non-academic practices have a more dominant role in decision-making, a view I share with Anugwom (2002). To a large extent this reflects events taking place in wider society, where corruption and patronage play an ever-increasing part (Smith, 2001).

This point reinforces my argument that the university can be viewed as indicative of social change taking place in other arenas of society.

## **Conclusion**

This thesis seeks to achieve two central objectives. First, I analyse an institution of the Nigerian state and examine its day-to-day workings and its relationship to Nigerian society; and second, I use this analysis to critically assess the neopatrimonial state paradigm of African states. To address the first goal I have analysed in detail the methods used by both staff and students to navigate their way through the University of South Eastern Nigeria. In doing so I have argued that both groups make use of three different 'currencies' – merit, personal connections and money – in their efforts. The precise combination in which these currencies are utilised depends on specific circumstances. My analysis provides a number of conclusions about the operation of the Nigerian state and its relationship with society. The second aim is met through analysis of these processes in the context of the dominant theory of African states, that of neopatrimonial state theory. I have endeavoured to show that this literature, while identifying the same processes as I have – patronage, informality, corruption – places them in a framework that obscures as much as it reveals. The neopatrimonial approach can be characterised as producing scholarship that is heavy on metaphor and generalisation, but, beyond its central, monolithic conclusion, conveys little of how 'ordinary' Africans experience the state on a daily basis. This concluding chapter will synthesise these two contributions, and, using both primary data and literature analysis, will address three deficiencies of the neopatrimonial approach: its substantive conclusions, epistemological and methodological approach, and historical reasoning.

### **Substantive conclusions**

Nigerian higher education is a curious amalgam of different influences. It is a site in which individuals are engaged in an ongoing process of negotiation and mediation between two sets of norms: on one hand, those that emanate from official policy, and on the other, those that view it as acceptable to appropriate the university's resources to benefit others – self, kin, community, friends. Each individual will find themselves under tremendous pressure to meet different obligations, both from inside and outside the university, and each will react differently to this pressure. The result is an institution that is highly complex, constantly changing and incorporates a wide variety of viewpoints on the morality of different actions. The most important contribution made by this thesis is its analysis of the methods and processes used to enter and succeed in this institution, an elite Nigerian university, which illustrates the everyday practices at the heart of the Nigerian state. It is this characterisation, using data acquired during fieldwork and analysis of literature, that is the building block upon which the rest of the thesis rests. A number of important conclusions can be drawn from my analysis.

First, I argue that, for large numbers of both students and staff, achieving success in Nigerian higher education can be incredibly difficult without recourse to one or both of the two unofficial 'currencies' I have identified, personal connections and money. Amongst all but the highest-performing students, some form of unofficial assistance is generally required to enter USEN. Once inside, students have the choice whether to work hard to try and achieve success or opt to either sort lecturers through financial payment, pay others to do their work or use personal connections to advance. Exam malpractice is also very common in both entrance and internal exams. The use of extra-legal means of success for students in contemporary Nigeria is increased by the fact that, for many, higher education is perceived as a means to an end – the

acquisition of a degree certificate – and the way in which this is achieved is far less important. Alongside the growing importance of a degree in contemporary Nigeria, this is a potent motivator of increasing informality.

Among lecturing staff, the balance is tilted very much in favour of personal connections. Connections to influential individuals and factions were the most important ‘currency’ potential academic staff could utilise and the use of temporary appointments increased the ability of influential individuals, and particularly factions, to bring in lecturing staff who were sympathetic to them. Once inside, these connections were also extremely important, in particular for gaining promotions, but also other benefits such as committee memberships and doctoral research supervision. The importance of financial corruption amongst academic staff lies not in their ability to use money to influence their own advance, but their affinity with other academic staff on the basis of participation in extra-legal practice. This forms the basis of the contemporary factional struggle in USEN’s public administration department, though self-interest is the prime motivating factor for faction membership for some staff. My research suggests that both patronage and factionalism have become more important at USEN over time, reflecting broader changes in Nigerian society.

All of the characteristics I have outlined here point to the existence of a system in which the informal rules consistently outweigh the formal and practices such as patronage, clientelism and corruption exert significant influence. It is for this reason that the neopatrimonial paradigm retains some value. However, the paradigm goes further and argues that these characteristics are ubiquitous. My research suggests that this conclusion is misplaced. While many people working in the Nigerian higher education system respond to norms that privilege financial appropriation of the state and assisting those in their social network to enter the university and advance once inside, this is neither absolute – in that even those privileging these norms cannot utilise them with impunity – nor universal – in that a sizeable minority respond either completely to official norms or only to those unofficial norms they perceive to be ethically justified. The Nigerian state, therefore, is neither a power-politics-led free for all, nor is it the façade described by Chabal and Daloz (1999). My empirical research suggests that the social science faculty at USEN, and particularly the public administration department, were filled with individuals working within unofficial sets of norms. Yet even in this department there were individuals whose primary motivation appeared to be to perform their duties as best as they could and who worked hard to help their students to learn. If within other departments and faculties, as my research suggests, the work ethic is stronger, this implies a system that is not privatised but is instead witnessing conflict between two sets of norms. That the norm favouring individual gain rather than public service appears to be winning does not imply that conflict is not taking place: it is.

A final criticism of the neopatrimonial approach lies in its lack of consideration of the pressures felt by individuals working within Nigerian higher education. This approach tends to be critical – implicitly or explicitly – of patronage and corruption, but fails to examine these processes from the point of view of the actors involved. As Smith (2006) points out, those who work in the Nigerian public sector come under acute pressure to redistribute the gains they can make from their position, while my respondent Christopher Nwangwu went as far as to suggest that those who do not redistribute correctly could be “lynched”. This pressure, however, is largely ignored by the



neopatrimonialists. This is not a substantive criticism as such – authors of this approach do not make statements that are incorrect, as they do on other issues – but their approach lacks appreciation of individual dynamics in favour of generalising and condemnatory stance.

My review of literature throughout this thesis has contrasted the neopatrimonial paradigm with the less common micro-empirical approach (see for example Smith, 2001, 2003, 2005, 2006; Olivier de Sardan, 2009; Blundo, 2006). My empirical work also allows critique of some of Smith's work, in particular his argument in favour of a notion of the "informal rules of the game", which suggests that all Nigerians respond to certain norms that govern their action, and to break them is to break commonly-held rules of society. My research at USEN suggests that there is significant leeway offered to individuals depending on their position in the institutional hierarchy and that the rules differ markedly depending on who is 'in charge' in a particular arena. Any notion of "informal rules of the game" that are known and adhered to by all is therefore incorrect. An example from the public administration department at USEN will illustrate this: when 'control' of the department shifted from a faction whose goals were broadly in line with the formal rules of the institution to a group whose were not, the norms of the department changed radically. Practices which would have been unacceptable – such as the imposition of a lecturer with close links to the Vice Chancellor on the department regardless of his qualifications – immediately became acceptable. The 'informal rules of the game' therefore have to be placed in the context of the conflict at the heart of Nigerian higher education.

Second, Smith suggests that kinship is the most important influence over patterns of patronage in Nigeria. This is true, but my research suggests that it is less dominant than Smith argues. Church membership, friendship and other linkages such as fellow trade unionists or ex-schoolmates all exert strong influences over people depending on their values and closeness to particular individuals. The relationship between patronage and corruption is also messy and changeable and depends on a number of interrelating factors such as the position of each individual in terms of status, wealth and personal connections, the relationship between them and the feelings of obligation the helper has for the helpee. In short, broad patterns of patronage and corruption are extremely difficult to identify because each transaction is dependent on so many variables.

### ***Distinct spheres, interpenetrating spheres, or a syncretic system?***

An important debate that has arisen from this research concerns the way 'ordinary' Nigerians experience their social system. Different viewpoints abound, but they can be summarised as follows. Some authors (such as Chabal and Daloz, 1999; Clapham, 1985) argue for the existence of two completely distinct realms. One is 'official' and consists of the formal rules and regulations making up the state. This realm exists only in law, is wholly privatised and is little more than a façade masking informal personal relations. The second consists of society's informal rules, and is the sphere in which the real business of the state takes place. Within this realm patronage, clientelism and corruption operate freely. In Ekeh's terms, this process can be conceptualised as the values of the "primordial public" – individuals' communities of origin – being transferred to the "civic public" – the state – in order to take from it. Other authors (such as Zolberg, 1968; Blundo, 2006; Olivier de Sardan, 2009) argue that these two realms are visible

but that they are going through a constant process of interpenetration and reconstitution of one another. A third group (Smith, 2006; Murunga, 2006) suggest that to speak of two realms fails to understand the way Africans experience their state, which is as one reality.

I argue that providers and users of USEN experience its operation as two different realms that are constantly reforming and reconstituting one another. My research suggests that service providers – in this case academic staff – operate according to ‘official’ and ‘unofficial’ norms simultaneously, and they cherry-pick which ones they are guided by according to a variety of pressures, such as the external (outside the university) pressure to support kin, community or ethnicity on one hand, and the internal (inside the university) pressure to maintain the veneer of respectability on the other. However, these individuals are aware of the motivations guiding each decision: in some circumstances they may be guided by rational-legal norms and in others patrimonial ones; more likely, each decision is guided by a combination of the two. The key point is that these individuals are aware of which norm is guiding their behaviour. My data does not go so far as to suggest, as Smith (2006: 13) does, that the two realms are “experienced as one reality”.

For service users the situation has some similarities, but is also different in important ways. It is different because the service user – in this case, the student – is, at least during the process of application, largely at the mercy of service providers. Their choices are therefore much more constrained than academic staff. Despite this, students applying to USEN still experience two different but interpenetrating realms, as the case study of Emmanuel Adeniyi, discussed at length in chapter four, illustrates. Emmanuel failed to gain entry to USEN on the basis of his exam results (official realm), so found a ‘saviour’ who could help him gain entry (unofficial realm). Throughout this process he was acutely aware of the relationship between the actions he took and the official rules: he had failed to gain entry on the basis of official rules, so subsequently moved on to unofficial methods. These two realms therefore existed separately in Emmanuel’s mind during the process, and he used whichever was most appropriate to allow him to reach his goal – entry to USEN. This also illustrates the fact that his achievement of this goal was a combination of official achievements – a score of over 200 on JAMB – and unofficial resources – a personal connection: the decision taken to admit him was on the basis of both these criteria.

### **Epistemological and methodological conclusions**

As noted in detail elsewhere in this thesis, many of the conclusions drawn by neopatrimonial state scholars accurately reflect the patterns of rule and association in contemporary Nigeria. Emphasis on a lack of distinction between public and private realms and on widespread corruption strike at the heart of Nigeria’s contemporary crisis. But these conclusions fail to adequately encapsulate the way both service users and providers experience their state on a daily basis. Instead this thesis has adopted a different approach, grounded in empirical reality and shorn of its normative elements. Two criticisms of the methodological and epistemological approach of neopatrimonial state theory are particularly important.

The first problematic aspect of the neopatrimonial state approach lies in its normative elements. Much writing from this approach cannot conceive of a state that does not

look to mainstream development discourse, which is itself western-inspired and reductionist, for its inspiration. The modern Nigerian state does not have many similarities with the Weberian ideal-type state, but that should not provide an excuse to denigrate it through negative comparison. I argue instead that there is no reason to expect the Nigerian state to have the characteristics of a Weberian rational-legal state because of its history. A pre-colonial history of state forms that showed a huge amount of diversity, a colonial period in which ethnicity was made the central aspect of identity and governance was shorn of its modes of accountability, and post-colonial politics that emphasised ethnic conflict and consumption over investment were never likely to produce such an outcome. Instead, therefore, analyses of African states should concentrate on description and analysis and reject unhelpful and unrealistic comparisons with radically different political systems and with ideal-types that are not met in the west either.

The second problem is methodological and lies in the tendency of the neopatrimonial paradigm towards a broad-brush, homogenising approach and consequent lack of understanding of the intricacies of different public arenas. This criticism is termed “essayism” by Olivier de Sardan (2009: 39) and refers to the lack of empirical basis of much neopatrimonial state scholarship. Long-term ethnographic work is required to gain a true understanding of African states (see also Olivier de Sardan, 2009), but neopatrimonial state scholarship fails to engage with this. Instead it relies more on analysis of documentary sources, and therefore misses what Mustapha (2000: 104) terms the urgency of contemporary African life. This criticism would doubtless be addressed by neopatrimonial state scholars by asserting that their goal is to provide broad, general conclusions about the functioning of African states and that, because my research highlights the role of patronage and corruption in contemporary Nigerian higher education, I therefore support their general conclusions. I would address this point by arguing that, while neopatrimonialism is an important aspect of contemporary African states, to ignore its relationship to official norms is to misinterpret the situation and therefore give a misleading picture of how Africans experience the state on a daily basis.

A new approach to the African state, which addresses both these criticisms, would examine the lives, experiences and motivations of those living within such a state. This type of approach, which draws on empirical analysis and is inspired by a micro-empirical approach rather than the abstract generalisation common to much political science, encourages a much more realistic examination of the Nigerian and other African states. The Nigerian public sector can be neopatrimonial, corrupt and nepotistic, but this statement alone does not address the complexity of the functioning of the ‘everyday state’, nor the pressures individuals are under to meet obligations to those outside the system. Only in-depth empirical work can address this complexity.

### **Historical conclusions**

An important goal of this thesis has been to place the characteristics of contemporary Nigerian bureaucracy into historical context. This is necessarily a complex task because establishing the cause and effect of social phenomena is notoriously difficult to achieve with any certainty. My analysis suggests that the contemporary operation of the Nigerian state, in particular its higher education system, is the product of an historical syncretism that takes in certain aspects of pre-colonial culture but focuses

particularly on the colonial era. Post-colonial changes – notably the oil boom years and subsequent crisis, structural adjustment and military rule – have also had an impact, but the period of British colonialism has set up a path dependence that has been difficult to alter. Here I isolate the historical antecedents of some contemporary practices at USEN.

A useful example is the social legitimacy of private appropriation of the state for personal gain, which my research shows is rife at USEN and which forms a central aspect of the contemporary neopatrimonial state. There are two distinct perspectives on this phenomenon and they mirror the continuity and rupture arguments outlined in chapter one. The continuist perspective would suggest that the state appropriation phenomenon is a contemporary manifestation of the pre-colonial practice whereby plundering ‘out’ groups, which included everyone who was not a member of one’s home community, was acceptable and even encouraged. It also derives from the contention that pre-colonial Nigerian communities, of all ethnicities, did not develop states differentiated from society, so when the colonial state was set up it was viewed as a resource to be captured, rather than a body working in the public interest. By contrast, the rupturist argument, which is best summarised by Ekeh (1975), would argue that this situation has arisen directly from the colonial experience and the period of postcolonial state formation, which engendered a belief in the state as illegitimate and therefore ripe for plunder. This perspective was viewed as legitimate in the arena that mattered, the “primordial public”.

I would argue that the main factor underlying the prevalence and legitimacy of using the state for one’s own ends – whether they are for oneself, kin or community – lies in the alienation of people from the institution governing them, which, my research argues, would suggest the colonial era as the origin of this pattern. It is difficult, however, to exclude the role of pre-colonial ‘in’ and ‘out’ groups entirely, not least because the ‘in’ group bears such striking resemblance to Ekeh’s vision of the “primordial public”. What this suggests is historical syncretism, whereby influences from the pre-colonial, colonial and independence eras combine to produce the contemporary manifestation.

There are also practices evident in contemporary Nigerian bureaucracy that appear to owe nothing to the pre-colonial era and are direct products of colonialism, which created a path dependency that has been continued in the independence era. Two patterns of particular interest are the arrogance of power and factionalism evident at USEN. The relationship between staff and students at USEN is one that is characterised more by conflict than cooperation. Students, particularly those who are “anonymous” (Blundo and Olivier de Sardan, 2006), in that they do not have a personal connection with any member of staff, are unlikely to be treated fairly or even-handedly. They must try to navigate their way through an institution where decisions are often taken arbitrarily and tend to be based more on personal affinity than academic prowess. This arrogance of power amongst lecturers has direct roots in the colonial era and in particular the attitudes and behaviour of colonial-era bureaucrats, who learned their craft from the outgoing colonisers. Once again, these practices engendered a path dependence that has been difficult to alter.

It is much more difficult to identify the provenance of another important feature at USEN, factionalism, due to the paucity of literature on the subject in the African context.

There is no mention of the existence of factions in literature on pre-colonial Igboland. In part this is likely to be because communities were small and decision-making was on the basis of kinship. Factions would therefore have been unlikely to develop because it would have been both inappropriate and unnecessary to form allegiances outside one's family or kinship group. In addition, as noted above, clientelism, a similar phenomenon, also failed to develop in pre-colonial Igboland. Contrastingly, the colonial era ushered in methods of social relations and competition for resources that made seeking protection through solidarity with those of like mind a rational course of action. Factionalism could therefore be seen as a replacement for the security provided by kin in the alien environment of the colonial or post-colonial administration. The factionalism at USEN also appears to have intensified in the post-colonial period, particularly since the 1980s, when Nigerian higher education came to be viewed more as an avenue for individuals to get rich than as an arena of scholarship. It appears, therefore, that both the arrogance of power and factionalism that are so prevalent at USEN have roots in the colonial era and have intensified since. This suggests that some contemporary behaviour is the product of a syncretic amalgamation of pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial influences, while others did not exist in pre-colonial Igboland and were introduced as a direct result of colonial practice.

### **Recommendations for further work**

There are a number of conclusions that I have drawn from this research but there are also some questions left unanswered. The volume of literature on African states that comes from the neopatrimonial perspective – which draws mainly on the discipline of political science – dwarfs that based on micro-empirical analysis and which is primarily based on anthropology. In part this is due to the traditional anthropological focus on small-scale, 'pre-modern' societies rather than arenas such as the provision of public service or the state sector (Olivier de Sardan, 2005). It also may be a product of the sensitivity of many of the issues pervading contemporary African bureaucracy – corruption, factionalism, conflict – and the potential dangers, for both researcher and researched, in seeking to address these issues. However, there is clear need for more research on the 'everyday state' in Africa. It can fulfil many functions. The first and most important is to address the gap in the literature on governance from the perspective of service providers and users as opposed to that of outsider researchers. Some studies – including this one and others I have highlighted in this thesis (such as Smith, 2003 on health; Bierschenk, 2008 on the legal system; Blundo, 2006 on customs, the justice system and local fiscal services; Olivier de Sardan, 2009; Smith, 2001 on the state more generally) – seek to fill this gap, but a great deal more research is necessary to make up the shortfall between studies of this type and those of the neopatrimonial approach, particularly in other state arenas that have not been subject to this type of analysis.

### **Concluding remarks**

The picture that emerges from this research is of a university in conflict with itself. This seems to be a result of the competition taking place, which is also taking place in Nigerian society more generally, between two sets of norms and values. The first set of values are based on the legislative framework that arose from the imposition of colonial rule and, particularly, colonial bureaucracy, and suggest notions of equality and meritocracy. The second are the 'traditional', which privilege kin, community and

ethnicity over others. However, my research has illustrated that in actual fact 'traditional' values are nothing of the sort, and it can be argued that they are as much the product of colonialism and postcolonial politics as norms that are perceived as 'modern'. The operation of the 'everyday state', as viewed through the workings of the higher education system, reflects the operation of these two sets of norms. Each service provider and user will be subject to their operation in varying combinations and degrees. The state, in short, is not wholly privatised, though evidence suggests that it may be moving in this direction.

Scholarship on Nigerian and African states must reflect more on the empirical reality of state function as experienced by providers and users alike. Long-term ethnographic research is necessary to achieve this, and greater African input into this body of literature would be invaluable, though the reasons why so few Africans involve themselves in sensitive research of this type are understandable. Only through this kind of research can a more nuanced and understanding portrayal of African states and societies be achieved, and enable this paradigm – empirically grounded, non-normative, street-level, Afro-realistic rather than Afro-pessimistic (Olivier de Sardan, 2009), though still acknowledging the role of such processes as patronage, clientelism and informality – to gain ground over the abstract, normative perspective of the neopatrimonial approach.

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## Appendix 1: questionnaire for USEN students

Dear participant

Thank you very much for participating in this survey. The responses you give will remain anonymous, so do not be concerned that your responses will bring undue consequences.

Please be as honest as you can. It is very important for my survey that you answer each question as honestly as possible.

.....

### Personal data

1. What is your sex?

Male

☐

Female

☐

2. What is your age?

16-20

☐

21-25

☐

26-30

☐

31 and over

☐

3. What is your state of origin?

Enugu	
Abia	
Anambra	
Ebonyi	
Imo	
Akwa-Ibom	
Bayelsa	
Cross River	
Delta	
Edo	
Rivers	
Other: South-West (please state)	
Other: North (please state)	
Non-Nigerian (please state country of origin)	

4. Please state your father's occupation

5. Please state your mother's occupation

### Educational background

6. Please state all the schools and colleges you have attended, including dates. Please state whether these institutions are publicly funded or private institutions and whether they are 'urban' or 'village' schools.

#### Primary education

Name of school	Type (public/private)	Type (‘urban’/‘village’)	Years attended

#### Secondary education

Name of school	Type (public/private)	Type (‘urban’/‘village’)	Years attended

#### Tertiary education (pre current course)

Name of school/college	Type	Years attended

7. Please state level of course currently being studied

Undergraduate

☐

Postgraduate

☐

PhD

☐

Other (please state)

.....

8. If you are an undergraduate, please state your year of study

First year

☐

Second year

☐

Third year

☐

Fourth year

☐

Fifth year

☐

9. Which course are you studying?

--

10. How are your studies funded?

Self

☐

Parents

☐

Scholarship

☐

Other

☐

(please state)

.....

11. Which subjects did you take in JAMB, and what score did you achieve?

Subject	Score
<b>Total</b>	

12. How did you gain entry to UNN? (please tick one)

Direct entry ☐ (please state other higher qualifications)

.....  
 Merit list ☐  
 Supplementary list ☐  
 Don't know ☐  
 .....

Second list ☐  
 Other ☐ (please state)

**Current method of access to UNN**

13. Is the current method of application to UNN acceptable and fair?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If no, please state why

14. What percentage of students in your year of study do you think gained admission through merit alone?

0-10%	<input type="checkbox"/>	10-20%	<input type="checkbox"/>	20-30%	<input type="checkbox"/>	40-50%	<input type="checkbox"/>
50-60%	<input type="checkbox"/>	60-70%	<input type="checkbox"/>	70-80%	<input type="checkbox"/>	80-90%	<input type="checkbox"/>
Over 90%	<input type="checkbox"/>						

15. Does the current method of application to UNN unfairly benefit or disadvantage particular groups of applicants eg richer/poorer students, students from the South East region/other regions? Please provide as much detail as you can.

16. If you could change the current method of application to make it fairer, how would you change it?

Thank you very much.